

**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**

**United Way of Madison County**

uwmadisoncounty.org



3<sup>rd</sup> Session of Nonprofit University – United Way Track  
3:50-5:00PM – June 22

**Expert Grant Writing VOICES from the Community**  
Facilitated by Fred Whitlow

**NOTE TO THOSE RECEIVING THIS DOCUMENT “post-NPU”**

Please respect the fact that these experts have limited time but several may have additional trainings or consulting available to assist your organization in writing grants. We have provided email contact info here for you:

Susan Phelan, Alabama A&M [sjpsprout@mac.com](mailto:sjpsprout@mac.com) ;

Robin Arnold, 5 Star Consulting; [missrobina62@yahoo.com](mailto:missrobina62@yahoo.com)

Glennis Wittmuss, Business owner and Development Coach for Agape Prison Ministries [Glenniswittmuss@gmail.com](mailto:Glenniswittmuss@gmail.com)

Derek Lane, Derek Lane Consulting, Inc; [derek@laneconsultinggroup.org](mailto:derek@laneconsultinggroup.org)

Suzanne Harbin, Wallace State Community College; [suzanne.harbin@wallacestate.edu](mailto:suzanne.harbin@wallacestate.edu)

Facilitated by Fred Whitlow II, Huntsville Housing Authority and No More Dirty) [fwhitlow@huntsvillehousing.org](mailto:fwhitlow@huntsvillehousing.org)

**QUESTION #1:**

**1. As you look back over your time writing grants, what would you consider the most important lesson you have learned about this subject.**

Susan P: I wish I had known more about how foundations do their funding. It was a steep learning curve understanding that you have to look at the actual 990s to see what many foundations actually give and what the restrictions may be. Seeing a foundation and a brief description of what they fund in a subscription database does not cut the mustard! If the foundation does not have a website (now all these years later), that is a good indication they don't want applicants

I also wish I knew how important it is to get several people to review a grant prior to submitting, especially someone who is not familiar with the program being proposed. This is a good way to ensure there are no significant omissions or gaps in telling a compelling and cohesive narrative.

The importance of reading the grant application guidelines CAREFULLY cannot be overstated.

Robin Arnold: There is no need to be so wordy in your letters of intent or the detailed text in your grants! All the grantors want is the answer to their questions! Frame those answers in a way that will help your application stand out. Simple answers, using the grantors words.

Derek Lane: The importance of "blending" resources and relationships - or spending as much time establishing/building relationships with potential funders as I did understanding the specific requirements of the RFP.

**QUESTION #2:**

**2. What did you wish you had known when you first began writing grants?**

Susan P:

The importance of developing a mock or preliminary budget before you begin writing. As part of your early evaluation, ask yourself, "Does what you want to accomplish exceed the grant award? Or does it required matching funds that will be difficult to obtain? Where will those matching funds come from?"

**United Way of Madison County | 701 Andrew Jackson Way | Huntsville, AL 35801**  
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Secure letters of commitment/support within the first couple of weeks of beginning the grants process

If you are entering a partnership/consortium/collaborative grant with other entities, develop/sign an agreement with roles/responsibilities/funding allocations before beginning the grant development.

Recognize in the world of nonprofit that unexpected things happen and build in more time during the proposal development cycle for unexpected problems or delays. If there is an online submission, complete the package and submit in plenty of time to avoid unanticipated computer problems, internet access, etc.

Submitting a hard copy proposal? Be clear on the required number of copies, method of binding, mailing address, is deadline "received by" or "postmarked" ?

**QUESTION #3:**

**How do you identify your agency's/program's strengths and grantors with authentic alignments to your work?**

Susan P: For A&M grants I use [Grants.Gov](https://www.grants.gov) and agency websites. For local non-profits, I check Foundation Center's listing for local and state opportunities, and keep a running list of the organizations on an annual calendar along with their focus areas – no need to apply for funding if your program's mission and that of the grantor don't align STRONGLY.

Glennis Wittmuss: During the beginning of my business, I learned to listen to my gut. Every nonprofit I ran into needed a grant or so they thought, for something. Many thought it was a way to obtain easy money. Not the case!

Robin Arnold: Read the requirements of the grant, and if you can simply answer yes and provide a daily/weekly/monthly working example to "back-up" your "yes" answer...you are aligned with the grantors wishes and request.

Derek Lane: My consulting firm conducts an initial assessment to determine if the client is in a "position" to pursue funding. The initial assessment may involve the completion of one of our tools used to determine where an agency is in terms of its internal capacity. This capacity-benchmarking tools (attached) provides a "snapshot" of the overall capacity of an organization and whether it is positioned to launch or expand a development plan. (In fact, the attached tool is the same one I used to launch the Cornerstone Initiative.) We spend more time studying responses under the "board" and strategic planning" benchmarks as we do the "financial management" and "fundraising" sections. The tool is a simple excel spreadsheet. It is an extensive but very informal process.

We'll also engage in interviews with staff, board, clients or potential clients to get an overall picture of the strengths and areas for improvement – can we deliver on what we say we can do?

Glennis Wittmuss :I learned to carefully understand the different types of submissions for grants. Because of my background I focus on faith based grants vs government grants. You have to decide what is best for your circumstance. Online software for grant submittal is not always the best way but you may not have a choice. Investigate this early and follow the grantor's guidelines to a T.

**Question #4**

What are the **best sources you have found for grants?**

Robin Arnold: Start with the internet!!! The key is to type in what you **need** followed by the word "grant". When the results come up, don't just look on the first page! Look on pages 1-4. It is time consuming but well worth it.

Derek Lane: Some of this is information I share as a part of Lane Consulting's grant-writing training workshops. For those just starting out, I encourage them to pursue the most traditional routes: **Foundation Center**, local foundations and corporations, GrantWatch, the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, local municipalities (typically your community-development office), the Chronicle of Philanthropy (funding opportunities are available with a subscription), Melissa's Data ([www.melissadata.com](http://www.melissadata.com)) and the National Center for Charitable Statistics ([www.nccs.urban.org](http://www.nccs.urban.org)), to name the most popular that come to mind...

The last source I mentioned is one I offer specific instructions on how to use...I've attended grant-writing workshops around the country for the past nearly twenty years and have never heard a thorough explanation or training on how to use free resources from research sites that are readily available. We provide details on how to utilize these resources in our training.

Finally, [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) provides a free subscription list or listserv for nonprofits to receive the latest federal funding opportunities when they become available. So instead of searching for funding opportunities, federal agencies will automatically make the latest rfp's available based upon your customized preferences.

Glennis Wittmuss: Best sources:

- Grant station
- **The Foundation center**
- Foundation Library in Birmingham

Suzanne Harbin: Best Sources to look for grants

- Grants.gov – subscribe to the daily feed and specify agencies
- Grantsiren – [grantwriters.net](http://grantwriters.net)
- State agency websites

Derek Lane: I know longer contract to write grants for clients. It's much more helpful to build their internal capacity by providing initial training on how to pursue and write them on their own through our grant-writing workshops. In that way, it becomes an internal skillset and creates less dependency on "outside" support from folks like us! I doubt we'll have time to provide a thorough explanation or exercise but we can at least put it out there as a potential source.

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United Way of Madison County provides, in their frequently asked questions on their website, additional resources and information related to their grants and resources locally. Visit <http://uwmadisoncounty.org/our-work/faq> and look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> listed question for these details.

Feel free while you are on our website to become more familiar with the variety of important investments and work that United Way and its partner agencies are involved with in Madison County, AL.

Cathy Miller, Community Impact Director, United Way of Madison County

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