

# HUMAN GRANTS

HOW TO STOP SOUNDING ROBOTIC,  
CONNECT, AND USE AI TO CRAFT PROPOSALS  
THAT ACTUALLY GET FUNDED!



# Human Grants

## How to Stop Sounding Robotic, Connect, and Use AI to Craft Proposals that Actually Get Funded.

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# Why Humanity Still Wins (Even in the Age of AI)

The first time I ever read a grant proposal, I felt my soul fall asleep.

It was for a youth arts program that was doing incredible work — mentoring teens, painting murals across blighted neighborhoods, helping kids discover pride in their own creativity. Yet the proposal describing that work read like a manual for assembling a washing machine.

Every sentence **began** the same way: *“The organization seeks to implement...”*

Every paragraph **ended** with the same sterile phrases: *“in accordance with the stated objectives”* and *“as outlined in the programmatic goals.”*

There were numbers, charts, and timelines. There were buzzwords galore:

“impact,” “stakeholders,” “measurable outcomes.”

But there wasn't a single heartbeat.

And here's the twist — it wasn't written by an amateur. It had been drafted by a consultant who'd “won millions” in past grants.

Technically, it checked all the boxes. But when I asked the nonprofit's director to read it aloud, her voice cracked halfway through the first page.

“This isn't *us*,” she said softly. “It doesn't sound like what we do.”

That moment changed how I thought about grant writing forever.

Because the truth is, funders don't fund spreadsheets. They fund *stories*.

They fund *people*.

They fund *belief*.

The best proposals don't sound robotic — they sound *real*. They sound like someone who cares enough to make a difference and can express that passion with clarity, empathy, and purpose.

### **The Myth of the Perfect Proposal**

If you're just getting started with grant writing, you've probably already run into the myth: that the only way to win funding is to write in a specific "grant tone" — dense, detached, and dripping with jargon.

You've seen those templates that promise to "guarantee" success if you follow their formula exactly.

You've maybe even tried pasting your own words into one of them, watching your heartfelt project shrink into a lifeless document that even you don't want to finish reading.

Here's the good news: funders aren't looking for perfection.

They're looking for *understanding*.

They want to see that you grasp the heart of the problem you're addressing, that you've thought through the solution, and that you have the capability and compassion to deliver results.

The best proposals feel like a conversation between two people who share the same dream. One has the idea, the other has the resources — and the proposal is simply the bridge that connects them.

### **Where AI Fits In**

Now, let's talk about the modern twist — artificial intelligence.

AI can brainstorm, outline, rewrite, edit, and even mimic tone. It can suggest stronger verbs and better structure. It can help you find funders faster than you ever could alone.

But what it *cannot* do — what it will never do — is *believe* in your mission. It can't feel the weight of a community need, or the joy of a project that changes lives.

It doesn't know what it's like to see a child's confidence bloom, or a local program finally get off the ground after years of struggle.

That's where *you* come in.

Your job as a grant writer is to be the human in the equation — the one who uses these powerful tools not to sound more like a machine, but to sound *more like yourself*.

AI can help you structure your thoughts, clean up your grammar, and polish your proposal until it shines. But the spark — the *reason* your project exists at all — that's yours alone.

### **People Fund People**

Every foundation, agency, or donor you'll ever approach is made up of — you guessed it — *people*.

Behind every logo is a team of humans trying to make decisions that matter.

They're overworked.

They read dozens of applications every week. They want to feel confident they're investing in something real.

When your proposal feels authentic — when it communicates clearly, demonstrates understanding, and speaks with heart — you make their job easier.

You give them permission to believe in you.

That's the real secret behind successful grant writing. Not formulas. Not jargon.

Not guesswork.

*Connection.*

## What You'll Learn Here

This book isn't about stuffing your writing with buzzwords or reverse-engineering what you think funders want to hear.

It's about developing a *human approach* to winning grants — one that combines emotional intelligence, storytelling, and smart use of AI to produce proposals that stand out for all the right reasons.

### You are about to learn how to:

- Research funders who genuinely align with your mission — and speak their language.
- Write with clarity and compassion so your ideas don't get buried in bureaucratic noise.
- Use AI as a co-creator to speed up your process, sharpen your message, and improve your confidence.
- Craft budgets that tell a story, not just list numbers.
- Edit for emotion, precision, and impact — so every sentence earns its place.
- Build relationships that turn first-time funders into long-term supporters.

And most importantly, you'll learn how to do it *your way* — authentically, powerfully, and humanly.

### A Final Word Before We Begin

You don't need to be an English major or a professional writer to create winning grant proposals. **You just need to care deeply, think clearly, and learn to tell your story in a way that moves people.**

That's what this book will help you do.

By the time you finish, you'll have a process — part art, part science — that makes grant writing less intimidating and infinitely more rewarding.

You'll understand how to use AI tools as an *assistant*, not a crutch. And you'll never again stare at a blank page wondering how to start.

So, let's begin.

Let's make your words — and your work — impossible to ignore.

# Before You Write — The Human Side of Preparation

Every strong proposal begins long before a single word hits the page. It begins with curiosity.

The most successful grant writers I know aren't just good writers; they're detectives. They dig, listen, and learn before they ever start typing. They don't just want *a* grant—they want the *right* grant, from the *right* funder, for the *right* purpose. And that difference in approach is what separates a winning proposal from the kind that quietly disappears into someone's unread inbox.

Take the story of Marisol.

Marisol ran a small literacy nonprofit out of a converted storefront in her neighborhood. Her volunteers helped adults learn to read, one chapter at a time. When she decided to apply for her first grant, she made the mistake most beginners make: she found a big foundation online, skimmed the application, and started writing.

It looked promising. The foundation supported “community initiatives,” which sounded close enough. But when she sent it off, she never heard back—not even a rejection.

Months later, she learned why. The foundation primarily funded large-scale arts programs, not small literacy efforts. She had aimed well but missed the mark because she hadn't done the detective work first.

Research isn't busywork—it's the foundation for everything else.

Start by identifying organizations whose missions overlap with yours. Study not just their current grant listings, but their *past* awards. What kinds of projects have they supported? What outcomes do they celebrate? Who sits on their board? These details tell you what they value, often more than their official guidelines do.

If you're not sure where to begin, here's where AI can save you hours of searching while still keeping your research intentional. Try this:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*"List 10 potential grant funders whose mission aligns with [your cause or project], focusing on those who support [your region or demographic]. Include website links and the average size of past grants."*

A prompt like that gives you a starting point. Then your *human* intuition takes over—you'll notice patterns, tone, even the emotional energy behind each funder's mission statement. That's the part AI can't interpret, but you can.

Once you've found a few promising matches, dig deeper. Download their annual reports. Read their blog posts. Watch their videos if they have them. You're not just checking boxes—you're learning their *language*. Every funder speaks differently. Some emphasize data and measurable outcomes. Others respond to storytelling and social impact. When you know how they talk about success, you can reflect that understanding back in your proposal naturally and honestly.

Another useful way to frame your research time is to think of it as *relationship building*. You may never meet the funder in person, but relationships can begin

with awareness. Many funders host information sessions or webinars; others have LinkedIn pages or community newsletters. Engaging with their content or even sending a short, genuine email to clarify eligibility can put your name on their radar—in a good way.

A great AI co-pilot prompt for this early stage might be:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Draft a short, professional email introducing myself to [funder name], expressing interest in their funding priorities, and asking if our project would be a potential fit.”*

The goal isn’t to impress them—it’s to connect. Funders appreciate applicants who take time to understand their work. It signals respect, and respect opens doors.

Now, before you even outline your project, pause to check eligibility. It sounds obvious, but too many hopeful proposals are disqualified for simple technical reasons—like the organization being too new, the wrong nonprofit classification, or the project falling outside the funder’s geographic range. Think of eligibility as your gatekeeper: if you don’t meet the criteria, move on. Energy wasted here is energy stolen from a funder who *is* right for you.

At this stage, it helps to keep a “Funder Research Sheet” or notebook—a living document that grows as you discover more about each opportunity.

**For each funder, jot down:**

- Their mission and primary focus areas
- Who they’ve funded in the past
- Application deadlines and cycle dates
- Contact information or portal links
- Notes on tone or specific language they use

You'll begin to see a pattern. Some funders use words like *innovation*, *entrepreneurship*, or *scalability*. Others highlight *community*, *sustainability*, or *equity*. Each word reveals what they truly care about.

When you then later sit down to write, you'll echo those values naturally—not by copying phrases, but by aligning your story with their worldview.

**Here's the secret most beginners don't get:** grant writing is 70% research and relationship, 30% writing. If you skip the first part, you'll struggle with the second.

Once you've done your homework, the writing flows more easily because you're no longer trying to impress; you're trying to *connect*.

**Before you move on, take a moment to define your project clearly. Ask yourself three questions:**

1. **What problem** are we solving?
2. **Who benefits** if we succeed?
3. **Why does it matter** now?

Those questions are deceptively simple but essential. Every line of your proposal should eventually tie back to them.

If you'd like to sharpen those ideas further, here's a good AI prompt for brainstorming clarity:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*"Help me summarize my project idea in 3 concise sentences: the problem we're solving, who benefits, and the positive change we want to create."*

Read your output, but don't accept it blindly. Edit it until it sounds like something *you* would say aloud. That's how you maintain your voice while using AI as a helpful mirror.

By the time you've finished this first phase—research, relationship, reflection—you'll be miles ahead of most beginners. You'll know who you're writing for, what they value, and how your mission complements theirs.

And that's when the real writing begins. Not with fancy language or perfect formatting, but with purpose. You'll no longer be guessing what to say; you'll be sharing what truly matters, in a way that truly feels natural and confident.

Grant writing isn't about filling forms. It's about *forming connection*.

And every great connection begins with understanding.

# Clarity is Connection — Writing Without Jargon

We have went over understanding who you're writing for, this next bit is about understanding *how* to speak to them.

Most new grant writers believe they need to sound formal — even academic — to be taken seriously. They bury good ideas under layers of complex phrasing, thinking it makes them sound credible. The result? A proposal that feels safe, sterile, and instantly forgettable.

Funders read those kinds of applications every day. They all blend together — walls of text, recycled buzzwords, and endless sentences that sound like they were written by committees rather than humans.

Here's the truth: clarity isn't just good writing. It's a sign of *competence*. It tells the reader you know what you're doing and that you respect their time.

And the fastest way to achieve clarity is to write like a person talking to another person.

## A Story of Two Proposals

Let's compare two excerpts from real-world proposals (names changed).

### Version 1:

The program seeks to leverage interdisciplinary methodologies in order to facilitate equitable access to digital literacy tools for underserved youth populations in alignment with district-wide strategic initiatives.

Now read that again, but this time imagine you're the funder — reviewing your fifteenth application before lunch.

It's technically fine. Grammatically correct. Full of good intentions.

But it feels distant. No heartbeat.

### Version 2:

We're helping teens from low-income neighborhoods learn essential digital skills so they can compete for real jobs in our local economy.

Suddenly, you know exactly what they're doing, who it's for, and why it matters. The message connects — not because it's fancy, but because it's *human*.

Grant writing isn't a test of vocabulary. It's an exercise in empathy. You're explaining something complex in a way that makes sense, quickly, to someone who doesn't live your day-to-day reality.

Clarity is kindness.

## Finding Your Voice

If you've been told your writing needs to "sound more professional," here's a better translation: your writing needs to *feel more trustworthy*. And trust doesn't come from jargon — it comes from sincerity.

One of the best ways to find your authentic voice is to speak your ideas out loud. Pretend you're explaining your project to a friend who knows nothing

about your work. Notice the words you naturally use — they're usually clearer and more powerful than anything you'd type in "grant mode."

AI can be a great helper here. Try giving it your first draft and asking it to simplify without losing professionalism.

### **AI Prompt Example:**

*"Rewrite this paragraph at an eighth-grade reading level while keeping the tone professional, confident, and inspiring."*

You'll see your sentences shrink. Your meaning sharpen. Then you can fine-tune the phrasing until it sounds like *you*.

Remember: clarity doesn't mean dumbing things down. It means removing everything that stands between your reader and your message.

### **How Funders Actually Read**

Here's something most people never tell you: funders skim before they read.

Their first pass isn't for content — it's for *feeling*. They're asking:

- Is this proposal easy to follow?
- Does it sound confident?
- Do I trust this writer?

Only after that emotional "yes" do they dig into the details. If your writing feels heavy or confusing in those opening paragraphs, you've lost them before you ever get to your strongest points.

That's why the first two or three sentences of any section are crucial. They should orient the reader, explain what's coming, and make them want to keep reading.

For example:

Our program helps 200 single parents each year earn career certifications that double their income within 12 months.

Simple. Specific. Clear.

You can always add context later, but your first line should paint the picture.

If you're unsure whether your writing has that initial clarity, ask AI to help you test it.

**AI Prompt Example:**

*"Summarize the main point of this paragraph in one sentence."*

If the summary matches your intent, you're on track. If not, revise until it does.

**The Curse of Knowledge**

One reason clarity is hard is because you know too much.

You've been living and breathing your program. You understand every acronym, every term, every nuance — and you forget that your reader doesn't.

That's called *the curse of knowledge*. It's when expertise clouds empathy.

A trick I often use is the "grandparent test." If you explained your project to your grandparent or someone completely outside your field, would they understand it? If not, simplify.

AI can help by identifying assumptions you might not realize you're making.

**AI Prompt Example:**

*"Read this paragraph and identify any jargon or terms that a non-expert might not understand. Suggest simpler alternatives."*

When you make your writing more accessible, you also make it more persuasive. Funders aren't experts in your exact field — they're experts in evaluating clarity and credibility.

**When Simplicity Meets Style**

Clarity doesn't mean your writing can't have rhythm or beauty. The best proposals combine precision with warmth. They use active voice and concrete language. They're vivid without being dramatic.

Compare these two lines:

“Program participants will receive supportive services.”

versus

“Every participant will be paired with a mentor who checks in weekly to help them stay on track.”

One is abstract; the other is alive.

The second line lets the reader *see* what’s happening. It builds trust by being specific. When funders can picture your work, they believe it more deeply.

### **The Power of Active Voice**

If you want your writing to feel clear and confident, use active voice whenever possible.

Instead of:

“It is anticipated that the program will serve 300 youth.”

Try:

“The program will serve 300 youth.”

Or even better:

“We will help 300 local teens build skills for their first jobs.”

See the difference? The reader immediately knows who’s doing what — no mental gymnastics are required.

If you’re unsure whether you’re slipping into passive phrasing, you can ask AI to highlight it.

### **AI Prompt Example:**

*“Identify sentences written in passive voice in this section and suggest active alternatives.”*

This exercise alone can transform how funders perceive your confidence and clarity.

## Clarity as an Act of Respect

It's easy to think of grant writing as persuasion, but really, it's generosity. You're guiding someone through your world — your project, your passion, your proof — and making it easy for them to understand.

That's respect.

Respect for their time, their attention, and their responsibility.

And respect always leaves an impression.

When your proposal reads smoothly, when every idea unfolds naturally, the funder feels something they don't even consciously register: *trust*.

And trust is what gets funded.

So as you begin drafting your proposal, remind yourself: your job isn't to sound smart. It's to make your reader feel smart — because they understand you.

That's the essence of human grant writing: clarity, connection, and confidence on every page.

# The Heart of the Proposal — Telling a Story That Moves People

Every proposal lives or dies on one thing — the story it tells.

Facts, data, and budgets might impress, but it's your story that makes a funder care. Humans make decisions emotionally first, then justify them logically. That means even the most analytical grant reviewer is looking for a spark — a reason to believe your project will make a real difference.

When that spark appears, you move from being one of a hundred applications to being *the one they remember*.

A few years ago, I worked with a community garden project that had applied for three grants and been turned down each time. Their proposal was technically sound. They talked about square footage, soil quality, volunteer hours. It was well-organized and completely forgettable.

When I met the founder, Maria, she told me why she started the garden: Her father had worked long shifts at a factory and used to bring home bruised vegetables from the food pantry. He always said, “One day, we’ll grow our own.”

After he passed, Maria turned a vacant lot into a garden in his honor.

That story was nowhere in her proposal.

We reworked the application, keeping all the facts — but now framed them around *why* the garden existed and who it helped. Instead of saying, “We aim to increase access to fresh produce,” the new version began with:

“When families in our neighborhood run out of food before payday, they often walk past this empty lot without knowing it used to feed us.

We’re turning it back into a place where the community can grow what it needs — together.”

That one paragraph did what statistics never could: it made people *feel* something.

The result? The project received not one but three separate grants that year.

Emotion, when used honestly, is powerful currency.

### **Finding the Story Within the Structure**

You don’t need a dramatic origin story to move funders. What matters is showing transformation — the journey from *problem* to *possibility*.

### Ask yourself:

- What **specific** problem does our project solve?
- What does that problem look like **in real life**?
- How does our solution **change** that picture for real people?

The strongest stories zoom in on individuals, not institutions. Instead of writing, “Our organization helps families achieve food security,” try, “Last year, Angela, a single mother of three, used our weekend meal kits to stretch her groceries through the end of every month — something she hadn’t been able to do in years.”

It’s personal. **It’s real**. And it puts a human face on your mission.

If you’re unsure how to start, here’s a great way to brainstorm your story foundation with AI:

### AI Prompt Example:

*“Help me write a short, three-paragraph story that shows the problem our project solves, how it helps real people, and the positive change it creates.”*

Then read the output aloud. You’ll instantly hear what feels genuine — and what feels over-polished. Keep only what sounds authentic. Let AI give you structure, but let your voice give it soul.

### Balancing Emotion and Evidence

The best proposals blend story and strategy. Funders want to feel something, but they also want proof that you can deliver results.

Think of it like a pendulum: on one side, empathy; on the other, evidence. Your job is to keep it in motion.

For instance, after sharing Angela’s story, you could follow with data like:

“Last year, our program served 1,200 families — and 83% reported increased access to healthy food options within six months.”

Emotion opens the door; evidence earns the trust.

AI can help you find that balance.

Try asking:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Blend this personal story with supporting data to create a paragraph that feels both emotional and credible.”*

You’ll often get a version that flows naturally between heart and logic — something many writers struggle to do on their own.

**The Why Beneath the Words**

Every successful grant writer learns to articulate the *why*. Not just what the project is or how it works, but why it matters *now*.

Why this cause, at this moment, for this community?

Why are you the one to do it?

Why should this funder care?

Answer those questions honestly and clearly, and you’re already halfway to winning the grant.

Funders don’t want to just support projects; they want to support *movements*.

When you communicate urgency — not through fear, but through purpose — they see themselves as part of your story.

Here’s a simple but powerful exercise to sharpen your “why” statement using

AI:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Help me write one paragraph that clearly explains why our project is urgently needed right now, using professional yet emotionally engaging language.”*

Once you get that paragraph back, refine it until it sounds like your heartbeat on the page.

## Storytelling as Strategy

If clarity earns trust, storytelling earns commitment.

A strong narrative isn't decorative — it's strategic. It shapes how reviewers interpret everything else. A well-told story gives context to your goals, strength to your budget, and meaning to your data.

When your proposal reads like a living, breathing story rather than a sterile report, funders stop skimming and start imagining. They picture the faces, the changes, the outcomes. **They remember you.**

That's what "human grants" are all about — not just winning funding but writing in a way that honors the people your work serves.

# Structure That Sells: Turning Ideas Into Organized Impact

Good storytelling wins hearts. Clear structure wins funding.

Once you've captured attention with your story, you need to guide it somewhere — toward a plan that feels solid, strategic, and real. Funders want to know that the emotion they just felt will translate into measurable results. They want to see that you can deliver.

Structure is how you prove it.

Think of your proposal as a conversation that builds trust step by step. The order you present your information shapes how funders perceive your competence and clarity. It's not about sounding corporate — it's about leading the reader naturally from curiosity to confidence.

Most proposals follow a similar rhythm: a short introduction, a background about your organization, a statement of need, your project description and methodology, measurable goals, a clear budget, and a sustainability or evaluation plan. But structure isn't about rigid templates; it's about flow. Every section should feel like a continuation of the one before it — like chapters in a story that belong together.

Imagine sitting across from a funder over coffee. How would you explain your project so it unfolds naturally?

You might start by saying who you are, why the work matters, what problem you're solving, and how you'll solve it. Then, once they understand your purpose, you'd naturally move into what it will take — time, money, people, resources — to make it real. That's your budget. Then you'd end by assuring them that their investment won't vanish after the grant period ends — that what they fund will keep producing results long after the check clears.

That's all structure really is: telling your story in the order that makes emotional and logical sense.

If you've never organized a proposal before, here's where AI can be a surprisingly effective thought partner. Instead of trying to remember every section, let it help you build an outline you can personalize.

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Create a detailed outline for a grant proposal about [your project or organization], following a logical flow from problem to solution to measurable outcomes.”*

This prompt will give you a framework — but remember, AI outlines are like blueprints drawn by someone who hasn't seen your building site. They need your context, your terrain, your voice.

Once you have the structure, fill it in with your authentic story. Each section should serve a purpose:

- **Introduction:** sets the tone, names the problem, and defines your purpose.
- **Background:** builds trust by showing your track record and credibility.
- **Statement of Need:** paints a vivid picture of the issue you're solving.
- **Project Description:** shows how your plan creates meaningful change.
- **Goals and Objectives:** translate ideas into measurable steps.
- **Budget:** demonstrates that you've thought through every dollar.
- **Evaluation Plan:** explains how you'll track and report success.
- **Sustainability Plan:** assures the funder their investment has a future.

Each piece works together like instruments in a band — none should overpower the others, but each must play in tune.

Here's something most beginners don't realize: the proposal's structure isn't just for the reader — it's for you. It forces you to think through your project before anyone else does. As you fill in the sections, weak points become obvious. Maybe your plan needs clearer milestones. Maybe your goals need sharper metrics. Maybe your budget doesn't match your ambitions. That discovery process is where clarity and confidence are built.

AI can help you spot those weak points too. Try this:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Review this project outline and suggest any areas that seem unclear, unrealistic, or unsupported by data.”*

It won't replace your judgment, but it will highlight gaps you can strengthen before a reviewer ever sees them.

Another secret about structure: funders often read proposals in pieces. They might start with the executive summary, skip to the budget, and circle back later to the statement of need. That means each section must be able to stand alone and still make sense. Every paragraph should include just enough context that a reviewer jumping in at any point can still follow your logic.

You can test this by reading each section separately and asking yourself, “Would a new reader understand this without seeing the rest?” If the answer is no, add one or two sentences that anchor it in your bigger story.

Remember, structure doesn’t mean rigidity — it means rhythm. You’re guiding a reader through an experience. The more naturally your ideas flow, the easier it is for a funder to say yes.

If storytelling wins attention, structure earns belief. It turns passion into a plan. It tells your reader, *“We know what we’re doing, and here’s exactly how we’ll do it!”*

And that’s when **emotion turns into investment**.

# The Budget That Tells a Story

Every number in your budget is a sentence in disguise.

It’s easy to think of this part as the “technical” section — where the creativity ends and the math begins. But in reality, the budget is your final proof that the story you’ve told is doable, credible, and worth investing in. It’s where emotion becomes evidence.

Funders don’t expect you to be an accountant, but they do expect clarity. They want to see that you’ve thought through every expense, that your costs align

with your goals, and that you understand what it really takes to make your project work. A strong budget reads like a mirror of your proposal — the numbers and the narrative telling the same story from different angles.

Let's go back to Maria, the founder of the community garden.

**Her first proposal had a budget that simply said:**

- Supplies: \$5,000
- Labor: \$3,000
- Miscellaneous: \$2,000

It looked fine, but it told the reader nothing. Why \$5,000 for supplies? What kind of supplies? Who's doing the labor? What's "miscellaneous," exactly?

**We revised it to read:**

- Soil, seeds, and starter plants for 20 new plots: \$2,800
- Gardening tools and storage shed for volunteers: \$1,700
- Community signage and educational materials: \$500
- Stipends for local teens assisting with setup and maintenance: \$3,000

Same total. Completely different feeling.

Now the funder could see the project — the people, the tools, the purpose.

Each line is painted with a picture. It didn't just say what Maria was spending; it showed *why* it mattered.

That's the essence of a story-driven budget: numbers that make sense emotionally as well as logically.

If you want to get there faster, AI can help you organize your thoughts before you polish your spreadsheet.

**AI Prompt Example:**

*"Create a draft budget breakdown for a [describe project] that includes*

*categories like materials, staff, outreach, and overhead. Include short, one-sentence explanations for each line item.”*

You’ll get a starting framework you can personalize — and that “why” column, the short explanations, is gold. That’s the beginning of your *budget narrative*.

The budget narrative is one of the most overlooked tools in grant writing. It’s a short section — usually just a page or two — where you explain how and why you’ll spend the funds. But it’s also your last chance to speak directly to the reviewer in a human voice. It reassures them that your math reflects real-world needs, not guesswork.

For example, instead of writing:

“Transportation costs: \$1,200”

you could say:

“Transportation costs: \$1,200 to cover mileage reimbursements for mentors visiting students’ homes weekly across the county.”

That one extra line gives life to your numbers. The reviewer doesn’t just see a cost — they see mentors driving from house to house, real people helping real students. The number now *means* something.

When you’ve drafted your narrative, read it aloud and ask yourself: does this sound like an explanation or an apology? The right tone feels confident and transparent. You’re not asking for permission to spend; you’re showing stewardship.

If you need help tightening that language, you can use AI as an editor.

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Review this budget narrative for clarity and professionalism. Suggest edits that make it sound transparent, confident, and aligned with our mission.”*

The key word there is *aligned*. Every expense should echo your goals. If your project's purpose is to empower young entrepreneurs, your budget should reflect mentorship, training, and access to resources — not administrative padding that feels disconnected from impact.

**That alignment builds trust faster than anything else.** Reviewers subconsciously ask themselves, *“Would I spend the money this way if it were mine?”* A clear, human-centered budget makes it easy for them to answer yes. You'll also want to avoid “round-number syndrome.” Funders see right through it. When every line ends in zeroes — \$5,000, \$10,000, \$2,000 — it looks estimated rather than researched. Real costs rarely line up that neatly. Specificity feels real. \$4,875 says you've done your homework.

If you're not sure whether your budget feels balanced, here's a useful AI double-check:

**AI Prompt Example:**

*“Evaluate this budget for balance and realism. Identify any items that seem over- or under-estimated for a typical project of this kind.”*

AI won't replace your accountant, but it can highlight where your story and your math might be out of sync.

And remember, your budget tells funders more than just what you need — it reveals how you think. A thoughtful, transparent, and mission-aligned budget says, *“We're responsible. We understand impact. We'll use your support wisely.”*

When funders see that, their confidence rises.

And confidence opens checkbooks.

In the end, a good budget isn't about squeezing numbers into a form. It's about continuing the conversation you began in your narrative — showing, line by line, how every dollar turns into change.

When your words and your numbers speak the same language, the result isn't just persuasive — it's undeniable.

# Editing for Emotion and Precision

Most writers think editing means fixing commas. In grant writing, editing means finding your *heartbeat*.

It's where you take your big, messy first draft — full of passion and half-formed ideas — and begin shaping it into something sharp, confident, and believable. Editing is where emotion meets precision. It's the bridge between what you meant to say and what the reader actually feels.

A first draft is for discovery. The second draft is for decisions. The third is for trust.

When you sit down to revise, start by reading your proposal out loud. Not scanning — *reading*. Slowly. The way a funder might. You'll hear every stumble, every place where your tone wavers or your sentences feel too long. You'll catch the rhythm of your writing, and rhythm is what makes it readable.

Good writing has a pulse. It moves like a conversation.

If you find yourself gasping for air halfway through a sentence, that sentence is too long.

If you have to reread something to understand it, it needs clarity.

It's easy to fall in love with our own phrasing, especially when it sounds "official." But the truth is, the simpler you make it, the stronger it gets.

AI can be your ally here — not as your editor, but as your mirror. Try this:

### **AI Prompt Example:**

“Edit this section for clarity and flow. Keep it professional and persuasive, but suggest one sentence that adds emotional appeal.”

You’ll get suggestions that can help you spot patterns: passive voice, overused transitions, or places where the emotion fades too quickly. But never let AI have the last word. The best editor is still your own ear.

When you read your writing aloud, listen for three things:

1. **Clarity** — Do I understand this on the first read?
2. **Emotion** — Do I feel anything when I hear it?
3. **Confidence** — Does it sound like someone who knows what they’re doing?

If you answer “no” to any of those, the fix isn’t just mechanical — it’s emotional. Go back to your purpose. Ask yourself, “What am I really trying to say here?” Then rewrite from that truth.

Let’s look at a small example.

#### **Original:**

“The project aims to increase accessibility to educational resources among underserved populations through innovative community engagement initiatives.”

#### **Revised:**

“We’re helping families in underserved neighborhoods get the tools and training they need to learn, work, and thrive.”

The second version doesn’t sound smarter — it sounds *real*. And that’s what wins trust.

If you've ever had someone say, "I can't quite picture what you mean," that's your cue to add sensory clarity. Funders remember what they can visualize. Numbers matter, but pictures persuade.

AI can help you spot these "invisible spots" in your text. Try this:

**AI Prompt Example:**

"Identify sentences in this section that feel vague or abstract. Suggest specific details or examples to make them more vivid."

Once you've refined clarity and flow, you'll move into precision — tightening the bolts. This is where you check formatting, grammar, and alignment with the funder's guidelines. Every grant has small but important requirements: word limits, margins, labeling conventions. Following them perfectly isn't about bureaucracy — it's about signaling respect.

Funders often make subconscious judgments based on organization. A well-formatted proposal tells them you're detail-oriented. Sloppy spacing or inconsistent headings whisper the opposite.

Finally, get feedback from another human. Not just a colleague who knows your work — someone who doesn't. Ask them to read your proposal and tell you three things: what they understood, what moved them, and what confused them.

Their reactions will show you whether your message is landing the way you think it is.

You can also ask AI to simulate this kind of response before sending it out for human review.

**AI Prompt Example:**

"Read this proposal as if you were a potential funder. What parts make you

trust the applicant most, and which parts could be clearer or more compelling?”

This is a great pre-test. It won't replace real feedback, but it can help you anticipate questions a reviewer might ask.

When you're done editing, your proposal should read like the person you want funders to believe in — clear, grounded, and capable. Every sentence should earn its place.

Every paragraph should carry **purpose**.

Editing isn't just cleanup; **it's confidence-building**.

It's where your words stop sounding like hopes and start sounding like commitments.

And that's what transforms a decent application into a funded one.

# The Follow-Up: Building Relationships Beyond the Application

Most new grant writers think their work ends the moment they hit “submit.” They exhale, maybe celebrate, then wait in silence — like tossing a message into the ocean and hoping it drifts to shore.

But experienced grant writers know the real work is only half done.

Submitting a proposal is an introduction, not a finale. Whether you get funded or not, every application is a doorway into a potential relationship — one that can open bigger opportunities later, if you nurture it the right way.

**Think of it this way:** funders are people too. They're not mysterious gatekeepers holding bags of money behind glass doors. They're professionals juggling competing priorities, long reading lists, and constant pressure to make wise choices with limited resources.

When they hear from someone who's respectful, responsive, and genuinely grateful — whether that proposal gets funded or not — it stands out.

A good follow-up isn't about pestering for results. It's about continuing the conversation.

**Here's how.**

After submitting your application, wait a reasonable time — typically a few weeks after the deadline — before reaching out. Then send a short, courteous message. Something like:

“Dear [Funder's Name],

I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to submit our proposal for [Project Name]. We truly appreciate the thoughtful work your organization does to support [Community or Issue].

If it's appropriate, we'd love to know when decisions might be announced or whether there's any additional information we could provide to assist in the review process.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

[Your Name]”

**That one note does three things:**

1. It shows professionalism.
2. It demonstrates appreciation.
3. It opens the door for future communication.

If you'd like AI to help you polish that kind of message, here's a simple starting point:

**AI Prompt Example:**

“Write a polite, professional email following up on a submitted grant proposal. The tone should be appreciative, respectful, and short enough to read in under one minute.”

You can even include your project description in the prompt, and the AI will tailor your message accordingly.

Once you've made contact, resist the urge to chase updates too soon. Patience is part of professionalism. Instead, use the time to continue learning about the funder. Engage with their social media posts. Read their annual reports. Notice new initiatives they're supporting. When a funder sees that you're invested in their mission — not just their money — you move into a very small, very respected category of applicants.

If your proposal is approved, wonderful. Celebrate. Send a heartfelt thank-you that goes beyond formality. A short letter that says, “This funding will help us [specific outcome],” makes your gratitude personal and memorable.

If your proposal isn't approved, that moment can sting — but it's actually an opportunity in disguise. Many organizations skip this step, but a thoughtful follow-up after rejection can lay the groundwork for future success.

Here's an example:

“Dear [Funder's Name],

Thank you for considering our proposal for [Project Name]. Although we weren't selected this round, we're very grateful for the opportunity and for the vital work your organization continues to support.

If possible, we'd appreciate any feedback that could help us strengthen future proposals. We deeply value your time and insight.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]"

This small act of humility can open doors. Funders often remember applicants who handle rejection with grace. Many even provide feedback that becomes the blueprint for your next winning proposal.

If you're nervous about wording, you can ask AI to help you keep the tone right:

**AI Prompt Example:**

"Write a short, gracious email acknowledging a declined grant proposal, requesting feedback politely, and expressing continued interest in the funder's work."

When you receive feedback, thank them again. Then, use that information to make meaningful revisions. Don't treat rejection as a closed door — treat it as a training session. Every no brings you closer to a yes.

For organizations that award grants repeatedly, relationships matter as much as applications. Funders notice applicants who stay in touch with progress updates — short, genuine messages that say, "Here's what we've accomplished," even without asking for more money.

Example:

"Just a quick note to share that our community workshop last month served over 100 local residents — many of whom told us it was their first time learning about [topic]. Your past support helped make this possible."

That single email reminds them that your work is real, ongoing, and making an impact.

AI can help here too, especially if you need help striking the right tone:

**AI Prompt Example:**

“Write a warm, professional update email to a past funder, summarizing project results and expressing appreciation without requesting additional funding.”

The key is consistency. Stay visible between funding cycles. Funders like working with people they know, trust, and remember. Over time, your name becomes familiar — and familiarity builds confidence.

The goal isn't to “get” one grant. It's to become someone funders *want* to support again and again.

Your proposal may be what gets you in the door, but your professionalism and follow-up are what keep that door open.

The human side of grant writing doesn't end with writing — it continues in every email, every thank-you, every relationship you build afterward.

## **Using AI as Your Writing Partner (Not Your Replacement)**

Let's start with a truth that will never change: words that win funding come from *you* — your experience, your insight, your compassion, your story. AI can polish those words, expand them, and help you organize them... but it cannot replace the heartbeat behind them.

Think of AI as your writing **partner**, not your ghostwriter. The assistant who sits quietly beside you, waiting to help when you're stuck — but who doesn't know your mission unless you teach it.

When used thoughtfully, AI can save you hours, eliminate frustration, and even spark ideas you might never have found on your own. But when you hand over too much control, you risk losing the one thing that makes your proposal truly persuasive: *you*.

Here's what a balanced partnership looks like.

### **Using AI to Start, Not Finish**

The hardest part of any writing project is the blank page. AI is excellent at breaking that paralysis. It can help you brainstorm directions, structure your sections, or even find the right language to explain something complicated.

If you're staring at a cursor blinking at you, try this simple starter:

#### **AI Prompt Example:**

"Give me three different ways to introduce a grant proposal about [your project], each written in a professional but conversational tone."

The output won't be perfect — and that's the point. You'll see phrases or ideas that resonate, and others that don't. Highlight what feels authentic, delete what doesn't, and keep refining until it sounds like you.

The best writing doesn't come from typing faster — it comes from thinking better. AI simply accelerates that thinking process.

### **Using AI to Clarify Complex Ideas**

Grant writing often involves translating insider knowledge into language a reviewer can quickly understand. You might be explaining medical interventions, environmental programs, or technical processes. It's easy to get tangled in jargon without realizing it.

AI can help you simplify without watering things down.

**AI Prompt Example:**

“Rewrite this paragraph so a non-expert could understand it clearly, while keeping the tone professional and the meaning accurate.”

This kind of prompt teaches you to recognize what’s clear and what’s cluttered. Over time, it trains your own writing ear — you begin catching complexity before it sneaks onto the page.

**Using AI to Strengthen Structure and Flow**

AI tools are great at spotting disorganization — paragraphs that feel misplaced or repetitive. After drafting your proposal, you can ask:

**AI Prompt Example:**

“Review this section for logical flow. Suggest how I could rearrange or tighten it so the argument feels smooth and compelling.”

The suggestions may surprise you. Sometimes a small shift in order — moving one paragraph up or trimming a redundant phrase — transforms how the reader experiences your story.

But remember: AI understands patterns, not passion. It doesn’t know *why* a certain sentence matters most. That’s your domain.

**Using AI for Editing and Polishing**

AI can also be your second set of eyes — the one that never gets tired of commas. It catches passive phrasing, long sentences, and vague words you stop noticing after reading your own work ten times.

You might ask:

**AI Prompt Example:**

“Edit this section for clarity and tone. Keep the human warmth, but make sure it reads cleanly and professionally.”

Always review its edits carefully. AI tends to overcorrect by removing the personality that makes your writing distinct. If a sentence feels too stiff after revision, bring your voice back in. The best writing has fingerprints.

### **The Four Golden Rules of AI Grant Writing**

**1. Never fabricate.**

AI can make confident guesses that sound real but aren't. Always fact-check names, data, and examples. Funders can sense exaggeration.

**2. Always personalize.**

Generic writing gets generic results. Customize every proposal for the specific funder and opportunity. AI gives you a base; you make it belong.

**3. Fact-check everything.**

Treat AI output like a draft from an eager intern — useful, but not authoritative.

**4. Keep your voice human.**

The best test of voice is to read aloud and ask, "Would I actually say this?" If not, rewrite until you would.

### **When AI Becomes a Creative Partner**

Beyond the basics, AI can do more than tidy text — it can help you think strategically. You can brainstorm potential project names, compare two versions of an executive summary, or test different ways to tell your story.

Here's an advanced example:

**AI Prompt Example:**

"Compare these two versions of my project summary. Tell me which one is more persuasive for a funder focused on measurable outcomes, and explain why."

You're not asking it to write *for* you — you're asking it to analyze like an editor. That's when AI becomes a truly valuable collaborator.

And here's the interesting thing: the more you train AI on your authentic voice — by feeding it your own writing samples, past proposals, or even old blog posts — the more naturally it begins to reflect your tone.

Over time, it becomes like a trusted colleague who “gets” your style.

But even then, remember: the emotion is yours.

The sincerity is yours. The credibility is yours. AI just helps you express it faster.

### **The Future of Grant Writing in an AI World**

It's worth remembering that funders are also adapting. Many now use AI to manage applications, analyze keywords, or screen proposals for eligibility. But here's the irony — the more automated the process becomes, the more *human* your writing needs to feel.

A proposal that reads like it was written by an actual person — with rhythm, warmth, and purpose — stands out even more in a pile of machine-generated text.

The future doesn't belong to those who sound robotic.

It belongs to those who use technology to sound more like themselves.

The best grant writers of tomorrow will be half strategist, half storyteller — people who understand both algorithms and empathy.

So use AI proudly. If you are overwhelmed by all these ideas, you can try an AI assistant here's a good one <https://10xanything.com/plgptcpomega/> Let it amplify your ideas, refine your voice, and free you from the mechanical parts of writing... but remember, never hand it the steering wheel.

Because at the end of the day, funders don't fund software.

**They fund *you*.**

# From Proposal to Partnership

The best outcome of a grant isn't just a check — it's a connection.

When you stop seeing proposals as one-off transactions and start seeing them as the first chapter in a longer story, your whole approach changes. You're not trying to "win funding." You're building trust.

Every grant you land gives you a chance to prove two things: that you can deliver on what you promised, and that you care about the funder's mission as much as your own. When both of those are true, funding often becomes partnership.

Start with your reporting. Don't treat reports like homework. Treat them like storytelling opportunities. Show, don't just tell. Include photos, quotes, small human moments — the kind of details that make your project come alive. Numbers matter, but numbers with faces matter more.

If your grant supported after-school tutoring, don't just say "150 students improved literacy scores." Say, "When we first met Jamal, he hid in the back of the classroom. Last month, he read aloud for the first time — and his classmates cheered."

That single sentence reminds the funder why they do what they do.

AI can help here, too. Try this:

## **AI Prompt Example:**

"Summarize our quarterly results in a clear, upbeat tone for a report to funders. Include one short human-interest story that illustrates impact."

The output will give you a skeleton. Then you bring in the heart.

Beyond reporting, keep communication alive between grant cycles. Send brief updates or thank-you notes even when you're not asking for new money.

Something as simple as, "We thought you'd like to know that our mentorship program just hit its one-year milestone — and it's still growing," keeps you top of mind.

If your work evolves or expands, let them be among the first to know. Funders appreciate being part of your story's progress, not just its paperwork. That familiarity makes them more likely to say yes the next time you apply.

Over time, that trust compounds. Funders start recommending you to others. They introduce you to new opportunities. They become allies.

The most successful organizations I've worked with treat every grant like the start of a friendship. They celebrate successes together, own mistakes together, and communicate with transparency. That's how small first grants grow into multi-year commitments.

And here's where AI quietly helps again: by keeping you consistent. Use it to set reminders for reporting dates, draft follow-ups, or even summarize key metrics for quick updates.

**AI Prompt Example:**

"Generate a one-paragraph progress update summarizing project outcomes for the past three months. The tone should be friendly, concise, and appreciative."

The key word there is appreciative. Gratitude is magnetic. It turns formality into familiarity.

In time, you'll notice something shift. You'll stop chasing grants and start attracting them. Funders will reach out to *you* because you've earned their confidence. They'll want to be part of whatever you do next.

That's the quiet reward of human grant writing. Not just the money — the momentum.

Because when you write with empathy, follow through with integrity, and communicate with warmth, your proposals stop being applications. They become invitations.

Invitations to grow something together.

# The Human Grant Writer's Mindset

Every grant you write is more than a funding request. It's a promise.

It's a promise that what you're doing matters. That people's lives will change because someone — maybe you — cared enough to put those words on paper and make the case for it.

The deeper you go into this work, the more you'll realize that successful grant writing isn't about being perfect. It's about being *real*.

Funders aren't looking for flawless grammar or dazzling vocabulary. They're looking for honesty, clarity, and commitment. They're looking for someone who can take a complex idea and make it human — who can connect mission to money through meaning.

That's you.

Every time you research a new opportunity, draft a paragraph, or revise a sentence, you're doing something quietly powerful: translating hope into action. And now, you have the tools to do it smarter — with empathy guiding your words, and AI supporting your process.

When you start to see AI not as a shortcut, but as a collaborator — one that helps you express your ideas faster, clearer, and with more precision — something clicks. You write with less fear. You think more boldly. You start to sound like the professional you've been becoming all along.

Because you are.

You're not just a grant writer. You're a storyteller of solutions.

A builder of bridges between problems and possibility.

A translator of passion into plans that funders can believe in.

The next time you open a blank document and feel that familiar hesitation, remember this: you already know what to say. You've lived it, seen it, felt it. AI can help you shape the words, but the meaning — the heart — will always come from you.

So write. Research deeply, edit fearlessly, and follow up like a professional who values connection more than convenience.

You'll soon find that grants aren't just about getting money — they're about giving form to your mission.

And that mission deserves to be funded.

# Your Resources

Your grant writing journey doesn't stop here. To help you keep building momentum — and to make every proposal stronger, smarter, and more fundable — here are two powerful resources we recommend:

## 1. Ongoing Coaching & Professional Growth

👉 [PromoteLabs Coaching](#)

A trusted space to continue growing your skills — whether you're starting your

first proposal, managing multiple funding applications, or expanding into consulting and nonprofit leadership. Learn proven frameworks for clarity, storytelling, and strategy so every grant you write makes a stronger case for support.

## 2. Free Tools to Accelerate Your Funding Success

👉 [Access 10 Exclusive Tools](#)

Get instant access to a curated set of professional templates and planners that you can adapt for your grant writing and fundraising work, including:

- Project Planning Framework
- Proposal Writing Blueprint
- Donor Communication Templates
- Funding Follow-Up Checklist
- Storytelling for Nonprofits Guide
- Impact Measurement Worksheet
- Budget Planning Spreadsheet
- Clarity & Focus Workbook
- Narrative Editing Guide
- Confidence & Mindset Map

These tools will help you save time, organize ideas, and present your projects with clarity — so you can spend less time struggling with structure and more time securing the support your mission deserves.

Because once you learn to write with both heart and precision, funding stops feeling like luck... and starts feeling like leadership.