

Proposal Writing “Do’s” and “Don’ts”

<u>DO</u>	<u>DON'T</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the grantmaker’s website before you apply to see if you are a good match for what they usually fund and where they fund it. Find out what their typical gift size is for projects like yours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t request things that the funder doesn’t support. Don’t ask for more than the funder typically gives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give yourself enough lead time; it typically takes 3-6 months to get a final decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t ask a foundation to rush your application.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for funding for programs that are clearly within your mission and capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t force your mission to fit the parameters of the grant guidelines. (Don’t promise things you’re not sure you can deliver.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send a one-page letter of inquiry/letter of intent/letter of interest before applying, to see if the foundation will invite a proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t send unsolicited proposals, especially if they have not been tailored to meet foundation specifications. Instead, think about approaching a funder with a letter of interest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a detailed (line-item) budget <i>before</i> you write the proposal (it will help you clarify what you plan to do). Be sure that income and expenses match exactly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t be vague about how you will spend the foundation’s money; don’t “round up” your expense categories.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include in-kind contributions (and any cash contributions you have already received) in your budget to show that the foundation is not the only planned source of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't approach a foundation without having a plan to share that details your fundraising strategy and other sources of planned support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather all your documentation before you start writing proposals (your 501(c)(3), your organizational budget, list of board members, etc.). It will save you from scrambling around to find it at the last minute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't approach a foundation without proof of nonprofit (tax exempt) status or a fiscal sponsor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your application is about a specific project, make a clear case that the project is needed. Know your target population and help the foundation to understand them. Remember, it's about your clients and what they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't talk about what your organization needs, unless the grant is for operating or capacity building support. The application content needs to remain inline with the type of ask your organization is making.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the foundation know how you will solve the problem. The number one thing they want to know is <i>whether your project will work</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't promise outcomes that are unrelated to the problem or to your planned activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a specific plan to measure the outcomes of your project. Your measurements should be numeric (quantifiable), time-specific, and should indicate the projected change from the current state. For example, outcomes should be in terms of changes in your clients' conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't be "the voice of doom" and make your clients' problems sound hopeless.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what other organizations in your area are addressing similar problems, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't operate in a vacuum; don't assume that yours is the

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and how your program differs from theirs and/or can work with theirs (foundations like collaboration).	only program like it unless you've done thorough research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow directions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't modify font sizes or margins from the requested settings (<i>they will notice</i>). • Don't miss deadlines.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the proposal visually accessible, with enough white space, and graphics where needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't run all the paragraphs together to save space; it makes it hard to read and your message gets lost.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write in a respectful manner, with a focus on solving the problems of the clients. Always thank the funder for considering your request. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never write as if the funder is the enemy. For example, if a foundation has turned you down in the past, don't mention it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be brief, concise, and clear. Write in the active voice. Check your grammar and spelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't use flowery language or jargon.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask somebody not familiar with the project to read your proposal and tell you if they understand what you are trying to accomplish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't rush through a proposal and mail it without having somebody review it first. More than one reviewer is ideal.

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About Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.

At Methodist Healthcare Ministries we view capacity building as a process of organizational strengthening. We work alongside our funded partners and community organizations, building upon their assets to increase their impact in community and improve health equity. Capacity building is an investment in nonprofits' abilities to be more efficient, effective, and sustainable.