FREE TOOLKIT

Freelance Grant Writer Starter Kit (Free PDF)

A fill-in starter kit for new freelance grant writers: services menu, pricing models, a rate worksheet using your own figures, a client fit checklist and a 90-day plan.

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> This kit helps a new freelance grant writer define services, choose a pricing model, work out a rate from their own figures, screen clients and plan the first 90 days. It is general education, not legal, tax or business advice, and it makes no promise about income. When you write for a client, the funder's own instructions come first.

Checked November 2026. Codes and rules change, so confirm on the official site.

1. Services menu

Decide what you offer and what you do not. A short, clear menu is easier to sell and easier to deliver well.

Service	Offer it (yes, no, later)	What is included	What is not included
Funder research and prospect lists			
Grant readiness review			
Letters of inquiry			
Foundation proposals			
Government applications			
Budgets and budget justifications			
Editing and review of a client's draft			
Grant reports			
Grant calendar and tracking			
Training or coaching			

Sectors or kinds of client I know best:

Work I will not take on, and why:

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2. Pricing models

Model	How it works	Suits	Watch for
Hourly	You bill for the time worked at an agreed rate	Open-ended work, editing and small tasks	Clients worry about the total. Give an estimate and agree a cap
Flat project fee	One agreed price for a defined piece of work	A proposal or report with a clear scope	Scope creep. Write down what is included, the number of revision rounds and what counts as extra
Retainer	A set fee each month for an agreed amount or kind of work	Ongoing clients with a steady flow of applications	Unused or overused time. State what the month covers and what happens to unused time

Whatever the model, you are paid for the work, not for the result. Put the fee, the scope, the payment dates and each side's duties in a written agreement, and ask a qualified advisor to review your contract template.

Why not commission or a percentage of the award

Being paid a share of the grant, or only if the grant is awarded, is treated as unethical in the fundraising profession.

- The Code of Ethical Standards of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, published on afpglobal.org, says members are expected to decline receiving or paying finder's fees, commissions, or compensation based on a percentage of funds raised
- A grant is awarded for the costs in its approved budget. Many funders do not allow grant money to pay for writing the application, so check each funder's rules on allowable costs
- A funding decision depends on many things a writer does not control, such as the client's track record, the funder's priorities and the competition
- Pay tied to the award rewards asking for more money, not for the right amount, and leaves the writer unpaid for honest work on a declined proposal

If a client asks for this arrangement, explain why you cannot agree to it and offer a flat fee or a smaller first project.

My pricing model, or models, to start with:

How I will explain my fees and the no-commission rule to a client:

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3. Rate worksheet

Use your own figures. This worksheet shows the lowest rate that covers your costs and your target income. It does not predict what you will earn or what clients will pay.

Line	What to enter	Your figure
A	Income you need from this work for the year, before tax	
B	Business costs for the year (software, insurance, training, equipment, fees)	
C	Money to set aside for taxes, benefits and time off that an employer would otherwise cover	
D	Total to bring in: A + B + C	
E	Weeks you will work in the year	
F	Hours a week you can give to this work	
G	Share of those hours that is billable, after admin, marketing and learning	
H	Billable hours in the year: E x F x G	
I	Lowest hourly rate: D divided by H	

New freelancers often overestimate line G. Much of the first year goes to finding clients, not to paid work.

To price a flat fee, estimate the hours and multiply by your rate.

Piece of work	Estimated hours	Extra time for revisions and meetings	Total hours	Rate (line I or higher)	Flat fee

Ask a qualified tax advisor what to set aside for line C and which costs count for line B.

4. Client fit checklist

Run this before you send a quote. A poor fit costs more than an empty week.

Possible client:

What they want funded:

- ☐ The organization is eligible for the kind of funding it wants
- ☐ It has a defined program, a budget and someone who can answer my questions

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- [ ] Leaders understand that no one can promise an award
- [ ] The timeline is realistic for the work
- [ ] They will supply documents and financial figures on time
- [ ] One person is named to review and approve drafts
- [ ] They accept payment for the work and not a percentage or pay on award
- [ ] They will sign a written agreement and pay a deposit or a first invoice
- [ ] The work is within what I do well
- [ ] I have no conflict of interest with this client or its funders

Decision and reason:

5. First 90 days

Write down actions you control, such as conversations held and samples finished, not outcomes you hope for.

Period	Focus	My actions	Done
Days 1 to 30	Set up: services menu, rate, contract template, two or three writing samples, a simple way to track time and invoices		
Days 31 to 60	Reach out: tell my network, contact organizations in my sectors, offer a small first project		
Days 61 to 90	Deliver and learn: finish first projects, ask for feedback and permission to use the work as a sample, adjust my rate and menu		

People and organizations I will contact first:

Skills or knowledge I need to build, and how:

What I will review at day 90:

> **Want help with this?** The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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