

Top 10 Tips + Real-World Insights

What actually wins funding (from people who review it)



iTIP
Iowa Travel Industry Partners

• WEBINAR

WINNING STRATEGIES: TOP 10 TIPS FOR SCHOLARSHIP & GRANT WRITING

Practical tips to craft stronger, more competitive grant and scholarship applications.

📅 April 2, 2026
2 - 3 PM
Virtual



Presenters:

**Bonnie Alley**

Director of Business Development, Discover Ames
Chair, iTIP Education Committee

- Leads collaboration across Iowa's tourism industry
- Works closely with DMOs, partners, and stakeholders
- Passionate about connection, education, and industry growth
- Experience in writing and reviewing competitive grant and scholarship applications

**Chris Lee**

Executive Director, Des Moines County Conservation

- Nearly 20 years advancing outdoor recreation and tourism
- Turns natural assets into visitor experiences
- Brings hands-on experience securing grants and funding

"Together, we've seen what works—and what doesn't."

Welcome + What You'll Get

- 1** Practical, real world tips
- 2** What reviewers are *actually* looking for
- 3** How to stand out in competitive pools
- 4** Take-home resources & slide deck
- 5** Built-in mentor support (reach out anytime)
- 6** Live Q&A



Pro Tip: You'll walk away knowing exactly how to improve your next application.

Align With Your Goals

- 1 Does this truly fit your path or project?**
- 2 Reviewers are looking for intentional growth**
- 3 Not just “this looked interesting”**
- 4 Funding is a strategic investment in YOU**
- 5 Fit + alignment + clarity matter more than need**
- 6 Strong applications are intentional – not rushed**



Pro Tip: This is not free money—it's an investment.

Phase 1: Mindset



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1

Mindset Shift

- **You're not asking for a favor**
- **You are a qualified candidate**
- **Funding invests in impact & people**

2

Think Like a Reviewer

- **They are often done on top of full-time roles or as a volunteer**
- **They are comparing dozens of applications**
- **They are looking for clarity and fit**



Pro Tip: Be confident in your value – reviewers are looking for it

Phase 2: Understand the Opportunity

1

Read Like a Reviewer

- Scoring criteria = your roadmap
- Required materials
- Deadlines and formatting

2

Understand the Purpose

- What impact are they funding?
- What opportunity are they investing in?
- What outcomes matter most?

3

Do Your Homework

- Past Winners
- Talk to reviewers or past recipients
- Gather data early



Pro Tip: Strong applications are built before writing starts.

Phase 3: Prep



1 Get Organized Before You Write

- Budget
- Letters of support
- Resume + bio
- Data + metrics

2 Set Yourself Up for Success

- Give your reference time to write strong letters
- Create a “go-to” folder with all of your materials
- Read all of the application and materials before starting



Pro Tip: Preparation saves you time—and strengthens your application.

Phase 4: Your Story

1

Your "Why"

- Why this matters to you
- Why now
- Why it matters to your career

2

Connect Story to Impact

- Your journey
- Your vision
- Your industry impact



Pro Tip: Make it easy for them to believe in you.

Phase 5: Writing Strong Applications

- 1 Answer the Questions**
 - Sounds obvious ...but often missed
 - Be direct , not “kind of related”
 - Confidence is key
- 2 Be Clear, Not Fancy**
 - Simple > Complex
 - Authentic > Overly Polished
- 3 Tell a Story**
 - Situation
 - Task
 - Action
 - Result



 **Pro Tip: Clarity beats complexity every time.**

Phase 6: Writing a Killer Application

Step 1 – Follow the Basics

- Spelling and grammar matter
- Stay within word count
- Follow all instructions

Step 2 – Answer the Questions

- Be direct and specific
- Don't go off topic
- Make it easy to understand

Step 3 – Make It Yours

- Avoid copy and paste responses from websites
- Tailor each application
- Connect it to your goals

Step 4 – Use AI & Time Wisely

- AI is a tool – not your voice
- Don't rush – take time to proofread and put your best foot forward

Step 5 – Review & Get Feedback

- Proofread before submitting
- Ask someone else you trust to review it
- Be open to constructive feedback
- Fresh eyes catch what you miss



Pro Tip: Clarity and effort set you apart

Celebrate!

**If you get funded, celebrate! Tell the world!!!
Make the granting entities look like heroes.**

**If you didn't get funded, celebrate the fact that you now get
to learn how to do better.**

**Then do the work to find out why you didn't win, and use that
learning to make a better app next time.**





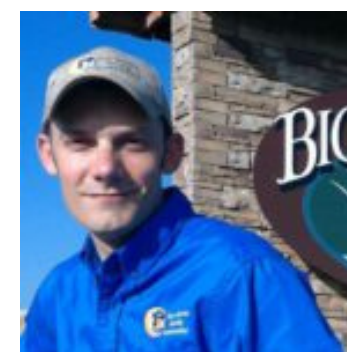
Q&A



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