

Grant Writer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for grant writer roles focus on your ability to research funding, write to criteria, manage stakeholders and handle budgets and deadlines. You may be asked to complete a short written task or discuss a sample application.

- **Process and research:** How you identify and evaluate grant opportunities and structure an application.
- **Behavioural and stakeholder:** How you have worked with program staff, finance teams and external partners.
- **Technical and budget:** Your approach to budgets, acquittals and using tools like SmartyGrants or Excel.
- **Scenario and judgement:** How you handle competing deadlines, changes in scope or rejection.
- **Written exercise:** Some employers ask you to critique a sample application or write a short response to selection criteria.

Typically a two-stage process. An initial phone or video screen with a hiring manager covers your background and interest. If you progress, a panel interview with program or finance staff will explore your process in depth, often including a short written task or a discussion of a past application you have written. You may be asked to walk through how you would approach a real funding round the organisation is considering.

1. Walk me through how you research a grant round and decide whether it is a good fit for an organisation.

Why they ask

This is a core process question. Employers want to see that you can prioritise opportunities and avoid wasting time on poor-fit applications.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with reading the guidelines, then check eligibility, alignment with strategy, effort versus likelihood of success, and finally consultation with program staff.

Example answer

"First, I review the funder's guidelines and selection criteria to understand what they are looking for. Then I check whether our organisation and project are eligible. I look at the program's strategic plan to see if the grant aligns with our priorities. I also consider the effort required versus the likelihood of success, because not every grant is worth pursuing. Finally, I speak with program staff to confirm they have the capacity to deliver the project and to gather initial ideas and data."

2. Tell me about a time you had to gather information from busy program staff who were reluctant to provide it.

Why they ask

Stakeholder management is central to grant writing. This behavioural question tests your approach to collaboration and persistence.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on how you built rapport, explained the benefit, and made it easy for them to contribute.

Example answer

"In a previous role, I needed outcomes data from a program team that was stretched delivering services. I scheduled a short meeting, explained how the grant would fund additional resources for their team, and offered to draft the data summary for them to review. They provided the figures and quotes, and we submitted on time. The application was successful, and the team later thanked me for making the process easy."

3. How do you prepare a budget for a grant application?

Why they ask

Budget skills are essential. This technical question checks whether you understand direct and indirect costs, funder rules and accuracy.

How to structure your answer

Explain your method clearly. Cover cost categories, use of Excel, checking funder guidelines, and confirming with finance or program staff.

Example answer

"I start by listing all direct costs, such as staff time, materials and travel, then add indirect or administrative costs if the funder allows them. I use Excel to build the budget and apply formulas to avoid errors. I check the funder's rules on what is and is not fundable, and I build in a small contingency if permitted. I always review the draft with a finance officer and the program lead to make sure the figures are realistic and match the project plan."

4. You discover a week before submission that a key outcome in the draft does not match the funder's priorities. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario tests judgement under pressure, communication and problem-solving.

How to structure your answer

Use a judgement-under-pressure structure: assess the issue, consult the right people, decide on a course of action, and communicate clearly.

Example answer

"First, I would confirm exactly where the mismatch is and how significant it is. If it is a minor wording issue, I might reframe the outcome to better align with the funder's language. If it is a major gap, I would speak with the program lead to see if we can adjust the project design or if we should withdraw and target a different round. I would not submit an application that does not meet the criteria, because that wastes everyone's time and could damage our relationship with the funder."

5. Describe a time an application you wrote was rejected. What did you learn?

Why they ask

This behavioural question tests resilience and continuous improvement. Employers want to see you learn from feedback.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Be honest about the rejection, then focus on the actions you took to understand why and how you improved.

Example answer

"I once wrote an application for a community arts project that was rejected. I requested feedback and learned that our budget did not clearly show how the funds would benefit the target group. I then worked with the finance team to create a more detailed budget breakdown and attended a grant writing workshop. In the next round, I applied the same approach to a different project and was successful."

6. What is your approach to acquittal reporting?

Why they ask

Acquittals are a key part of the grant cycle. This question checks whether you understand the importance of reporting and funder relationships.

How to structure your answer

Explain your process: track spending, collect evidence, write the report, submit on time, and maintain records.

Example answer

"I start by setting up a tracking system as soon as a grant is awarded, so I can monitor spending against the budget. I collect receipts, invoices and evidence of outcomes throughout the project. When the acquittal is due, I compile a clear report that explains what was achieved and how the funds were spent. I make sure it is submitted on time and keep a copy for our records. Good acquittal reporting helps secure future funding from the same source."