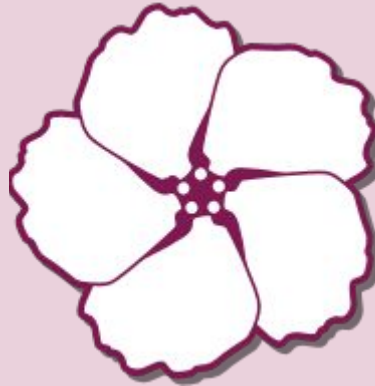


# How to Talk About Your Organization

Application Guide Series: Episode 4

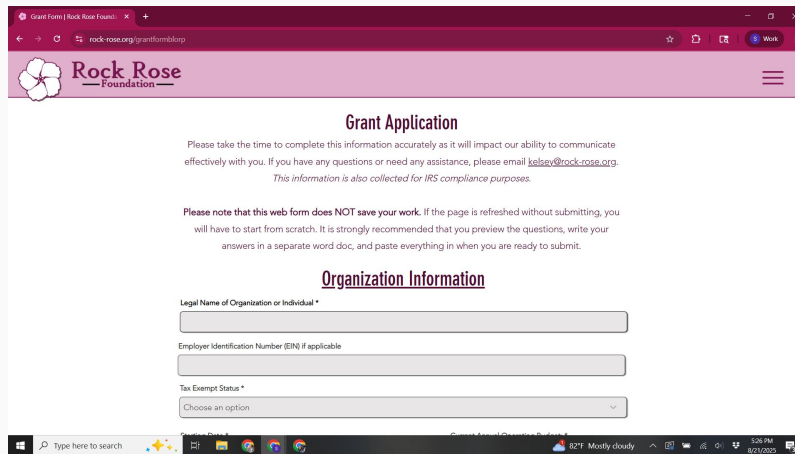


“How to Talk About Your Organization” is the fourth episode in the Rock Rose Foundation Application Guide video series. We recommend watching all the episodes to have a full understanding of our grant application process and expectations. In this video we will talk about how to respond to Rock Rose Foundation application questions about your organization’s structure, goals, and programming.

You can find links to the application and other resources mentioned in this video on our website.

It’s important to note that this video series is specifically designed with the Rock Rose Foundation grant application in mind. While much of the information may be helpful in completing applications for other grants, you should **ALWAYS** make sure you are aware of each individual grant’s rules and expectations.

# Our application is now ONLINE!



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [rock-rose.org/grantform.php](http://rock-rose.org/grantform.php). The page header features the Rock Rose Foundation logo and a hamburger menu. The main heading is "Grant Application". Below it, a paragraph states: "Please take the time to complete this information accurately as it will impact our ability to communicate effectively with you. If you have any questions or need any assistance, please email [kelsey@rock-rose.org](mailto:kelsey@rock-rose.org). This information is also collected for IRS compliance purposes." Another paragraph follows: "Please note that this web form does NOT save your work. If the page is refreshed without submitting, you will have to start from scratch. It is strongly recommended that you preview the questions, write your answers in a separate word doc, and paste everything in when you are ready to submit." The section "Organization Information" is highlighted in red. It contains three input fields: "Legal Name of Organization or Individual \*", "Employer Identification Number (EIN) if applicable", and "Tax Exempt Status \*". The "Tax Exempt Status \*" field is a dropdown menu with the option "Choose an option" selected. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows the Windows search bar, taskbar icons, and system tray information including the date 6/21/2020 and time 3:25 PM.

We are excited to announce that our application is now digital! Hopefully this will alleviate some of the technical challenges applicants have faced in the past. If you are experiencing technical difficulties with this application, please let us know right away.

We have also tried to streamline the application to make it even easier and quicker for you to complete. We know your time is valuable and we want you to be able to get back to your nonprofit work as quickly as possible.

Please note that this web form does NOT save your work. If the page is refreshed without submitting, you will have to start from scratch. It is strongly recommended that you preview the questions, write your answers in a separate word doc, and paste everything in when you are ready to submit.

Remember: It is okay to update and revise answers from other applications for this one.

# Cover Page

## Common Mistakes:

- Wrong contact info
- Ineligible for grant
- Incomplete Information
- Typos or Factual Mistakes

This part of the application provides the basic facts about your organization and project:

- Organization Overview
  - Legal info
  - Overall budget
- Contact Information
- Website/Social Media Links
- Project Overview
  - Mission
  - Amount Requested

The application starts with a cover page. Here we need to know the basic facts about your program or organization. This information helps us verify your eligibility and is used for our own due diligence and IRS compliance purposes.

Please take the time to complete this information accurately as it will impact our ability to communicate effectively with you.

# Cover Page

## Common Mistakes:

- Typos
- Outdated or inaccurate info

### Organization Information

Legal Name of Organization or Individual \*

Employer Identification Number (EIN) if applicable

Tax Exempt Status \*

Starting Date \*

Current Annual Operating Budget: \*

This date is the: \*



Organization  
Founding Date



Program Start Date

The cover sheet starts with overall organizational information.

- We use your legal name and EIN to look your organization up in state and federal databases, so please make sure what you enter matches any legal documents you have received from state or federal agencies. You might not have an EIN. That's okay.
- Remember: non-profit status is NOT required in order to be eligible for Rock Rose Foundation grants.
- The year founded typically refers to your entire organization or branch. However, if you are seeking a program grant, you can indicate when that specific program was started instead. Indicate on the application, which you are referring to.
- Please enter the operating budget for your entire organization or branch.

# Cover Page

## Common Mistakes:

- Typos
- Forget to check email/phone messages
- Non-responsive when contacted

**Outstanding Applicants...** have a point of contact who is knowledgeable about the organization/program.

The screenshot shows a form with two main sections for contact information. The left section is titled 'Enter contact information for your organization's Executive Director.' and contains three input fields: 'Executive Director Name \*', 'Executive Director Email \*', and 'Executive Director Phone \*'. The right section is titled 'If your contact person is not your Executive Director, please enter details below:' and contains a radio button labeled 'Contact person is Executive Director', followed by three input fields: 'Contact Person Name \*', 'Contact Person Email \*', and 'Contact Person Phone \*'. Below these sections are two more input fields: 'Street Address (principal/administrative office) \*' and 'Mailing Address \*'. Between the address fields are two radio buttons: 'Preferred contact method \*' with options 'Phone' and 'Email', and a checkbox 'Mailing address is the same as Street Address'.

Scrolling down, we get to the contact information section.

- One of the most common problems we run into is not being able to contact the person responsible for answering questions! The individuals listed on the cover page should be able to respond to requests for additional information throughout the review process or have quick access to someone who can.
- Always double check to make sure there are no typos in the contact info. We'd hate to be leaving messages for you on someone else's voice mail!
- We will do our best to use your preferred method of contact, but we recommend regularly monitoring your phone and email messages throughout the process and getting back to us as quickly as possible. Sometimes a quick question or clarification can make the difference between eligible and ineligible.

# Cover Page

## Common Mistakes:

- Typos
- Unrealistic cost/request
- Unclear purpose/mission

**Outstanding Applicants...**  
are fundraising on many fronts and attempting to tap into multiple sources of income.

Website or Facebook (if applicable)

### Project Information

Project Title \*

Total Project Cost \*

Project Purpose/Mission \*

Grant amount requested \*

☐ \$5,000 or less ☐ \$10,000 ☐ \$15,000 ☐ \$20,000

If less than \$5,000, enter the specific request \*

- A website or social media account aren't required. But if you have them, let us know. They can help us get to know you and the public facing work you are doing better.

Now it's time to enter specific project information.

- The project title helps us communicate clearly about your project.
- Total Project cost is what you will need in order to complete the project. If you are asking for an operating grant, this number will be equal to the amount of funding you are requesting. If you are asking for a project grant or a capacity building grant, this number may be higher than what you are requesting from us if you are gathering funds from multiple sources.
  - **NOTE:** It is GOOD to be seeking funding from many sources!
- As discussed in previous videos, your mission statement should be brief! We're looking for one sentence summarizing your cause, your action, and your impact. You can find more information on how to write a strong mission statement in episode 3 of this series.
- As of 2025, our grants are offered at specific funding levels.
  - Please select the amount that your program requires, and be

- prepared to explain your selection in your Budget Narrative.
- If you select "\$5,000 or less," please state the exact amount that you are requesting in the text box that appears. It's okay to round this number to the nearest \$100 dollars.
- If you are requesting more than \$5K, you have three choices: 10K, 15K, or 20K. Choose the one that best fits your needs. We understand that this may mean that you are requesting less than your total project cost (and seeking additional sources elsewhere) or slightly more than your total project cost. For example: If you need 14K for your project, it's okay to request 15K. We do not recommend requesting significantly more than your total project cost.
- **NOTE:** In some cases, based on the funding available and the number of applications we receive, Rock Rose Foundation may choose to offer a portion of your requested amount. It is then up to you to decide if you will be able to move forward with less funding than you requested. We understand that sometimes that isn't possible, and turning down the offer of a reduced grant has no negative consequences for your organization.

# Narrative Questions

## Common Mistakes:

- Inaccurate info
- Lack of detail
- Repetition
- Sloppiness
- Heavily reliant on AI

This part of the application is where you share more in-depth information about:

- Your team
  - Staff and volunteers
  - Leadership
  - Community collaboration
- Your vision
  - Impact - who & how
  - Knowledge & experience
  - Supporting research
- Your strategy
  - Specific steps necessary
  - Definition of success

Our narrative questions give you the opportunity to briefly describe your organization and proposal to us. Your answers will give us information on your expertise and commitment to the issue, help us understand how your idea matches our mission, and demonstrate how funding will directly impact a community or population. The questions are intended to focus your answers to your initiative, the results you hope to achieve, and how our funding can help you accomplish your goals.

We are excited to get to know you and your idea so please let your excitement and unique perspective show in your answers! Remember that many of the people reviewing your application are hearing about you for the first time. Make sure to include everything we need to know to understand the work you are doing.

Finally, don't overthink the questions. I promise, we're not trying to trick you. We're trying to get to know you and your idea as best we can.



# What if I'm Not a Strong Writer?

- **DO** your best to be professional and accurate.
- **DO** let your passion and personality shine through!
- **DO** trust yourself and your vision!
- **DO** ask someone you trust to review your application.
  - Spelling, grammar, & punctuation
  - Clarity - does it make sense?
- **DON'T** stress about small mistakes - We're not perfect and we don't expect you to be.
- **DON'T** wait until the last minute to get started.
- **DON'T** rely on AI to write for you.
  - **This is important!** We can tell because AI gives the same basic answers to everyone.

If you've watched from the beginning of the series, this slide will look familiar. It's so important we've included it twice!

We have noticed a heavy reliance on AI-written narrative answers in the past.

We do not recommend using AI to write your narrative responses. AI-written answers often lack personality and the specific details that make your organization or program different from everyone else. We can tell you from experience that AI gives just about the same answer to everyone who inputs the same questions. In past cycles, we've received several applications with almost identical wording for certain questions.

We would much rather hear YOUR voice coming through. While it's always a good idea to make your best effort at sounding professional, we are willing to overlook the occasional spelling or grammar mistake. AI will never be able to explain your vision with the same passion and specificity as you. Instead of turning to AI, we recommend giving yourself plenty of time to work on the application and asking a trusted friend to read it when it's done. Fresh eyes can often spot mistakes you've missed or point out

areas where a few more details are needed.

If you DO use AI, we recommend doing some heavy editing to make its **stock** answers original to you. Remember, AI is designed to write something that “sounds like” an answer ... not an actual answer. Where it says you will “create a plan,” you need to add specifics about the plan you’ve actually created! Where it says you will “create a diverse range of activities,” you need to list those activities out for us.

In summary, we care more about your program and your passion than your ability to write perfectly.

# Narrative Questions

## Protect your organization!

If something feels “off” when you are filling out an application, trust your gut. Do more research and talk to trusted experts.

## First, assess the expectations!

What do the questions reveal about the granting organization?

- Approach to collaboration
- Priorities and focus
- Understanding of issues and impact

What rules or guidelines have been provided?

- Length
- Style - bullet points? Paragraphs? An outline?

## “300 words or less”

Rock Rose Foundation is generally looking for 2-3 paragraphs.

Before you start writing your answers, we recommend scrolling through the questions. Each question is meant to learn something new about your program or organization. If you find yourself writing the same answer repeatedly, consider reading the questions again to see what each one is focused on.

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The questions an organization asks can tell you a lot about their interests, priorities, and collaborative style. Hopefully, our questions demonstrate that we are looking for authentic and collaborative relationships. That we care about diversity and direct community impact. That we are looking for a deep understanding of the problem you are trying to solve, including what’s already been tried. And that we are seeking thoughtful, well-planned out programs bringing fresh perspective to old problems and authentic relationship-based solutions.

You also want to make sure you understand the applications guidelines. For example, we have set a maximum limit of 300 words. If you’ve only written a couple of sentences, we probably won’t have enough information to really understand. If you’ve written a 5-page essay, you may be confusing us with too many details. Aim for 2-3 solid paragraphs. If

bullet points or an outline format make it easier to organize your thoughts, those are fine.

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A quick aside about safety: While there are a lot of caring, well-intentioned people in the world of philanthropy, there are also some bad actors willing to cause harm to others for their own benefit. If anything feels “off” or suspicious about an application, ALWAYS trust your gut. Take the time to do more research or consult with experts before entering into financial relationships with anyone. Legitimate grant applications do not have fees or require you to send money. You are your organization’s first line of defense. Be careful.

# Narrative Questions

## Common Mistakes:

- Inaccurate info
- Lack of detail
- Repetition
- Sloppiness
- Heavily reliant on AI

## Then, use YOUR voice to get us interested!

Answers reveal your...

- Knowledge of the issue & community impact
- Research
- Professionalism & attention to detail
- Level of commitment

**Be honest.**

**Make connections between the funder's mission and your project.**

### **Reminder!**

We don't know what you don't tell us. Be sure to include info on the planning and work you've already done.

Narrative responses are a great place to make connections between your work and the work our foundation is doing. There is a big difference between finding connection and telling us whatever you think we want to hear regardless of the truth, though. Be authentic and honest in everything you share with us. Building a trust-based relationship is a two way street.

One common mistake we see in narrative responses is the phrase "We're the only ones doing this work." Most often this just makes it seem like you haven't done your research. Instead, focus on what makes you stand out from the others working in your focus area.

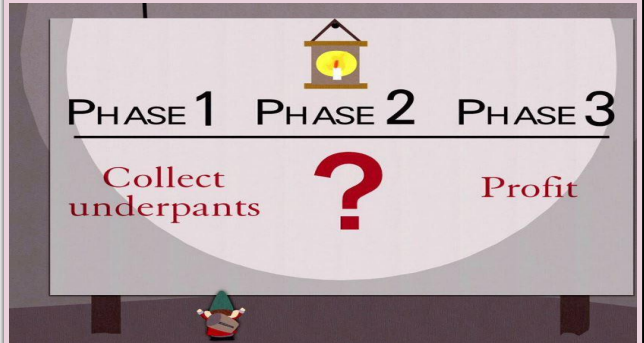
When it comes to describing your program, please include:

- What you've already done to get to this point,
- What you still need to do to prepare for launch, and
- How your action steps relate to your goals and objectives.

If your program is educational in nature, please include information about the educational experience of involved staff and volunteers, and a copy of your curriculum, whether it is something you have purchased or something you are developing yourself.

# NO Underpants Gnomes!

If you can't see how you're getting from Phase 1 to Phase 3, neither can your granting partners.



This silly graphic draws attention to one of the most common weaknesses we see in applications - a lack of specificity about how you are going to implement your idea.

Don't let a weak plan sink your application! Make sure you are showing a clear and actionable path from your vision to your successful impact in the community.

# Thanks!

Contact us:

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Hopefully you are feeling confident about how to complete the cover page and narrative portions of our application at this point.

You can find links to the resources mentioned in this video on our website at [www.rock-rose.org](http://www.rock-rose.org). Our executive director, Kelsey Hunt, is happy to answer questions about the foundation and our grant application. You can reach her directly via email: [kelsey@rock-rose.org](mailto:kelsey@rock-rose.org).

In the next video, called “How to Talk About Your Budget,” we will talk about how to respond to Rock Rose Foundation application questions about your organization’s budget.