Grant Writing for Musicians: Leveraging AI to Enhance Funding Requests

By Erin Walker Bliss

In today's arts landscape, grant writing is an essential skill for musicians. Securing support — whether for a commission or an outreach program — often comes down to how effectively a proposal is written. When used critically and creatively, artificial intelligence (AI) tools can help musicians refine their writing and better align their proposals with funder priorities.

With over $2 million in grants raised for programming at the Central Music Academy (CMA) in Lexington, Kentucky, I've seen firsthand how AI can transform the grant writing process. My PASIC session will delve deeper into these tactics; what follows introduces the core strategies and approaches that will be explored further in the session.

AI TOOLS

AI refers to technologies designed to handle tasks that typically require human thought — things like generating text, editing, and organizing ideas. A common form of AI used in writing is a GPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer), a model trained to understand and generate human-like text. Programs like ChatGPT (developed by OpenAI) and Gemini (from Google) are examples of AI-powered writing assistants. When us-ers type in a prompt, tools like ChatGPT or Gemini generate text by identifying statistical patterns in language, not by understanding meaning. While these systems lack true comprehension, they can still support the writing process — for example, by restructuring a disorganized passage or suggesting alternative phrasing.

MATCHING MISSION TO FUNDING

The first step in successful grant writing is identifying the most compatible funders for your proposal. I recommend

Erin Walker Bliss

starting with a searchable database like Instrumentl or Guidestar. These platforms allow you to narrow your search based on the kinds of projects you do or the communities you serve. The process can be taken a step further by integrating AI into the search.

For example, publicly available GPTs, such as GrantStation's Grant Fit Evaluator GPT, can evaluate a project description and provide CFP (call for proposal) alignment feedback based on a funder's published criteria. This tool helps you determine alignment with a funder's values, which can save time and lead to a more focused, compelling pitch.

WRITING WITH PRECISION

As musicians, we're often required to translate the value of our creative work into clear outcomes that resonate with funders. This means connecting the artistic to the civic: describing how a new marimba commission fosters cultural dialogue, or how a school steel band addresses inequities in music education.

AI tools can help clarify tone and suggest improvements to the overall organization of your text. One effective strategy is to use specific prompts, such as "Act as a grant reviewer," to evaluate your drafts before submission. This allows you to

simulate the funder's perspective and strengthen alignment with their expectations. Publicly available GPTs, such as GrantStation's Proposal Reviewer GPT, can also aid in this process.

Alternatively, using a prompt like "Ask me questions…" can be a helpful way to develop a section that feels vague or incomplete. For instance, you might ask the GPT to help you articulate the need for a community drumming program. This approach — often described as letting the AI "lead the process" — invites the tool to guide the conversation by asking targeted follow-up questions.

BUILDING CUSTOM GPTS AND USING AI PROJECTS

For recurring grant activities, building a custom GPT can be transformative. A custom GPT is a version of ChatGPT trained on your organization's language, mission, previous proposals, and program details. You can upload files such as donor letters, budget templates, or assessment documents, and the GPT will reference that material to generate more tailored responses in the current session or project. This keeps your messaging consistent and cuts down on repetitive writing.

Likewise, the Projects feature in ChatGPT allows users to create a centralized workspace for each grant (available with a ChatGPT Plus subscription as of mid-2025). You can upload an RFP (Request For Proposal), narrative templates, and supplementary materials. The AI tool then helps organize and draft your responses based on the funder's language and the structure of the RFP. This is particularly useful for large-scale applications such as those required by the National Endowment for the Arts or state arts councils.

These approaches also support collaborative work. When several team members are involved in drafting a proposal, Projects allows all files and discussions to remain in one place, which helps preserve version accuracy and prevents conflicting edits.

MEASURING AND DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

Evaluating the impact of a program is one of the more demanding parts of grant writing. Funders often expect to receive both qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrating a project's success. AI tools can assist in organizing this information and drafting early versions of evaluation sections.

To support program evaluation, musicians can use AI to surface key insights from student reflections or to visualize participation data over time. For example, I've used prompts such as "source student quotes that show the emotional impact of taking private lessons at CMA" or "create a visual for year-over-year participation growth in ensembles," in the past. AI can also assist in turning narrative feedback and participation records into cohesive summaries that highlight both engagement and outcomes.

That said, these outputs should always be reviewed for accuracy and tone. AI may misinterpret nuanced feedback, misread uploaded documents, or inflate claims, so human oversight is essential.

USING AI RESPONSIBLY

Despite its power, AI is not without limitations. Its outputs can be biased or inaccurate, and it cannot substitute for the insight, creativity, and cultural context that musicians bring to their work. Overreliance on automated tools can result in proposals that feel generic or disconnected from the people behind them; a well-chosen personal anecdote or firsthand example always helps ground a request in human experience.

Grant writers — especially those new to the process — will benefit from studying sample grant proposals to observe what makes some applications compelling and others less effective. Revisiting the fundamentals of clear writing will, of course, also sharpen any draft; in this way, a grammar or style reference book, such as *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, is an invaluable companion.

Finally, the environmental impact of AI use is worth considering. Large language models, such as GPTs, rely on powerful cloud-based servers to process requests, and running these models at scale requires substantial computing power. This server-side demand contributes significantly to overall energy consumption and carbon emissions. Being mindful of sustainability — particularly when using AI for early drafts or repetitive tasks — can help strike a balance between efficiency and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

AI will never write your best grant proposal, but it can help you write it more clearly, strategically, and efficiently. As a musician working at the intersection of artistry, education, and advocacy, I have found AI most useful when paired with thoughtful intention and a strong sense of mission. Whether you're applying for a small community grant or a major federal opportunity, AI can serve as a collaborative tool in your creative and administrative toolkit.

Musicians already know how to rehearse, revise, and respond. Bringing that same discipline to the grant writing process — with a little help from AI — can open new doors for your music, your organization, and the communities you serve.

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