

ASCFG Grower Grant Submitting Applications and Writing Reports

General Suggestions

1. Read the application directions carefully. Be sure to include all sections indicated and fit them within the three-page limit. Page limits are there for a reason. For large grant programs such as those through SARE, the reviewers may have many proposals to read, and page limits keep the reviewers from revolting. Since funding for ASCFG Grower Grants is modest, lengthy proposals might indicate that the project may exceed those funds. Try breaking it up into parts and submit one of those.

2. Be concise, but complete. Yes, those sound like contradictory statements but they are not. Reread the first draft of your proposal with that statement in mind. Some people are natural writers and can write five pages at the drop of a hat about their sleeping cat Fred, who is a wonderful black and white mix they got from the pound two years ago last October. You get the point. Those folks may need to focus on the concise part. Other writers assume that the readers know a lot about the topic and leave out too much material. Those folks may have to work on making sure the proposal has enough information for reviewers not familiar with the topic.

3. Be sure to have at least one other person read the grant proposal before you submit it. Yes, this means you will have to finish the proposal sooner than the night before it is due. But think of it this way: you now have somewhere to direct the energy of a bossy, know-it-all neighbor/friend. Ask him or her to read it over and give you suggestions. He or she should not only look for typographical errors and erratic syntax but also consider the overall flow and logic of the proposal. If you cannot submit an error-free proposal, how can the review committee be confident that you can do the work correctly?

Suggestions Specific to ASCFG Grower Grants

Appropriate subjects: Any research topic appropriate to ASCFG members will be considered.

Title: It all starts here. Make the title say something, but keep it fairly short. For example, *Using cover crops to control yellow nutsedge* is more helpful to the reader than *Determining the efficacy of three types of cover crops in growing cut flowers*.

Introduction, Justification, Literature Review: Introduce the issue, e.g. weed control, and then state how you propose to address the issue. The ideal grant should focus on a problem of importance to a wide range of growers, as it will be evaluated by several growers from around the country. If the topic is narrow, or if the results are useful only for delphinium growers in southeast Minnesota, it may not get a high score. Similarly, an app that

generates a list of cut flowers suitable only for Zone 11 growers won't apply to the majority of ASCFG members.

Provide literature citations or other information that supports what you are trying to do with the project. Note: company or advocacy websites and their conclusions should be considered carefully, or supported by neutral third-party data. Be objective about the material you read. If you start finding a lot of information that doesn't appear to support what you are thinking of doing, maybe the project won't work, or should be changed.

Objectives: State the major objective first. For example, *This project will develop a new method for controlling yellow nutsedge in cut flower beds.* State other objectives separately. For example, *We will also determine how control methods for yellow nutsedge affect cut flower productivity and quality.* In case you were wondering, *Give me money* is not a helpful objective.

Procedures: Several important points fall under this section:

A. Tell the reviewers how you will conduct the work: when you will start the experiment (e.g. May 2020) and what procedures you will use.

B. List the data you will collect and how you will collect them. *Determine if cut flowers grow better* is a goal, not measurable data. For example, do you mean 1) produce longer stems, 2) produce more stems, 3) produce higher quality/stronger stems, 4) produce harvestable stems earlier or later in the season when they generally are not available? The data for each of those variables would be stem length (1), stem number per plant or same-size bed (2), stem caliper or sales price [if higher quality= higher price] (3), and harvest dates (4).

C. Be sure to compare the new treatment or process to the existing standard method/cultivar/procedure. You have heard the phrase *9 out of 10 dentists recommend Plaque-Rid for brushing your teeth.* Compared to what? Not brushing your teeth? Using Jack Daniels as a mouthwash? In most studies you must include the standard control method and an untreated control to determine if the treatments actually had an effect. For example, the following might be a list of treatments for the yellow nutsedge study:

- a. New organic product
- b. New organic product at double rate
- c. Standard chemical product
- d. Standard cultural method—cursing and hand-weeding
- e. Control—no treatment

It is sometimes difficult to include appropriate control treatments. For example, if you are an organic grower, you won't be able to include the standard chemical product. Don't forget the untreated control. For example, the following might be a list of treatments for a postharvest experiment:

- a. New organic product
- b. New organic product at double rate

- c. Standard chemical product
- d. Untreated or water-only control

Why leave some of the stems untreated? If you don't, and the vase life for the first three treatments is very long, you might conclude that all the treatments are effective. If you have a control and you find out that the vase life was long for that treatment, then none of the treatments worked. Controls are required so the results of your treatments can be verified. Note that we can get opposite conclusions just by including proper controls.

D. Tell us how the treatments will be replicated across your farm or high tunnel or over time. For example, each of the weed control treatments could be applied to three different beds of zinnias. Why do this, which can take a lot of time and space? Because if you apply a treatment to only one location on the farm and it doesn't work, you don't know if it is the treatment or the fact that your dog used that portion of the bed as his own Facebook page.

Investigator's background. Tell the reviewers why you think you can do the work well. Tell them about your years of experience growing cut flowers, and any other grants you might have received and successfully completed. Stay focused here. A paragraph on your previous life as a rodeo clown may tell folks a lot about why you are the way you are, but won't help them determine if you complete the project for which you are applying.

Budget. So now we get to the money. List expenses you can quantify in the budget, both those you are asking the ASCFG to pay for and those you are going to contribute to complete the project. Provide a simple description of each item, for example, 1 gallon of Nutsedge-be-Gone at \$120.

The ASCFG would like to see matching funds, which can be the labor you are going to put into the project. Quantify the cost of the labor. For example, if you estimate that it will take you two hours a week for 15 weeks to do the study (i.e. apply the treatments and collect the data), multiply the number of hours (30) by the value of that time. You may include other expenses as part of the match.

Submitting a Report

The report should be in the form of an article for *The Cut Flower Quarterly*. If you follow a basic format, it will be easy to write the report. Most of the suggestions for writing the proposal apply here.

1. Title: An enticing title will make people want to read your article. For example, *Biorational Product Controlled Thrips* is more interesting than *Thrips Control Products*.
2. Introduction: Start with a summary of why you submitted the proposal. Tell the readers the problem you were trying to correct and why you thought your study was going to help.
3. Procedures: Tell the readers what you did and how the study went. Include enough information that a reader could try the same treatments and come up with the same

results.

4. Results: Summarize the results. If appropriate, include a table of data collected from each treatment. State which treatment(s) did the best and why you came to that conclusion. Do the data support your conclusion? Finish with a summary of what you are going to do or would suggest others do to handle the issue you researched

5. Acknowledgments: Be sure to include any companies that donated product to help with the study and list folks who helped you do the work. Have fun. List your dog Sammy if he helped calm you down when you realized that the report was due last week.