



THE REAL ESTATE  
**FOUNDATION**  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## A Really Good Grant Application

*We published an almost identical article in the Real Estate Foundation's 2001 annual report. Other than a few details which have changed since then, the article is still relevant. It is reissued here, with minor changes.*

*The original article was a collaborative effort by Pauline Gomez, Celina Owen, and Tim Pringle.*

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What's the difference between a good project that gets funded and a good project that doesn't get funded? All other things being equal, it is often the quality of the grant application.

### **Meet our mandate**

In applications to the Real Estate Foundation, it is crucial that an organization clearly states its project's relationship to land use or real estate practices. Many applicants interpret this question only in terms of how their project could improve property values in the community. From the Foundation's point of view, it is also important to consider how the project will use land, or influence the way land is used (or protected), to benefit the public trust, or public interest.

As a philanthropic organization, the Foundation only supports initiatives that we interpret to be in the public interest. For example, it is in the public interest that people who are disadvantaged by low income or poor health have access to decent, affordable housing. It is in the public interest for consumers to have access to non-partisan information about the practical aspects of buying and selling a house. It is in the public interest for governments to have regulations that protect natural landscape features from property development that is not informed by current, accurate environmental information.

Since the Foundation's philanthropy is land use related, it is important to understand our definition of land use before applying for a grant. In general, the Foundation takes the term "real estate" to mean real property. Real property refers to the land and anything of a permanent nature upon the land, such as structures, trees, minerals, and the benefits, interests, and rights thereof. The concepts of access to, ownership, management, and control (including regulation, planning, etc.) of real property are broadly termed "land use" for the Foundation's purposes.

It is possible for a project to be, in the strictest sense, "land use or real estate related" and not meet the Foundation's funding interests. For example, we do not usually consider projects related to a single resource use, such as forestry or agriculture, although they are definitely "land uses". We do not provide funding for camp dormitories or community centres, although they do pertain to "real estate".

Effective grant making requires a funding body to decide what it will and will not fund. As the Real Estate Foundation's legislated (*Real Estate Services Act*) mandate is broad, successive Foundation boards of governors have established policy and criteria to guide the Foundation's



grant making activity. This allows us to focus available grant dollars where we think we can have significant impact.

Here are two examples of how organizations might effectively describe their projects' relationships to land use and/or real estate:

- The proposed non-profit housing complex will provide affordable housing to a group of people that cannot afford market housing in the community. This project will meet a need that is not being adequately addressed by private sector developers.
- Our organization's research will be used to educate the community about the watershed's sensitive ecology so that individuals, stewardship groups, property developers, and local and senior government agencies can make informed decisions about how the proposed development can proceed with the least disturbance to the environment.

From time to time the Foundation pursues specific strategies to meet objectives geared to achieving more responsible land use and real estate practices. Our current grant making strategy is summarized in the "How to Apply" section of our website.

### **Write clearly**

Since an application to the Foundation does not exceed five pages, an applicant must be able to establish the need for the project, state its goals, and list the specific project activities clearly and concisely.

Proposals are not convincing when the statement of purpose or case statement is vague. For example, a watershed stewardship organization proposing to "inform landowners and the public about aquifer recharge issues" is not making a forceful statement of purpose. A more compelling statement of purpose would be: "Through a series of workshops, this project will inform landowners and the public about the geological characteristics of the aquifer and its vulnerability to potential land development planned for key water catchment areas in Area B of the regional district".

From a purely practical point of view, there are several things that help to make a grant application a joy to read:

- Don't be redundant; say it well the first time.
- Don't use too much jargon, technical or otherwise.
- Proofread the application. Spelling and grammar mistakes, missing words, and misuse of terminology (e.g., *complimentary* and *complementary*) are common.
- Address the Foundation accurately. The name of the organization is the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia or the Real Estate Foundation of BC.

### **Develop partnerships**

The Foundation always seeks an appropriate role as a potential funder. In general, we expect to be one of several agencies funding a project. By engaging grants and other revenue from several sources, the applicant demonstrates support.

The Foundation sometimes elects to be the major or sole funder of a project. In such cases, the purpose of the project must very closely match the Foundation's interests in furthering responsible land use.

We always expect applications to meet the review criteria described above. Successful applicants ensure that their projects meet the key terms of reference before submitting a formal application.

### **Help us help you**

As the first step in the grant application process, organizations are required to submit a letter of inquiry for staff review. The Foundation will invite an application if there appears to be a good fit for the proposal within the grants program criteria. If staff requires more information before deciding whether or not to invite a formal grant application, we will follow up with the organization at the inquiry stage.

The Foundation's website describes the application process, including what information to include in a letter of inquiry. Please read the "How to Apply" section of the website. If you are unsure whether or not your organization's initiative would even be considered by the Foundation, staff members are available by telephone to discuss project ideas.

The Foundation's screening process is designed to streamline the application process for everyone involved. We want you to succeed when your agency makes an application, and we don't want to spend time on proposals that have little or no chance of success. The process is not perfect, however. On average, the Foundation funds two thirds of applications received annually. One in three projects fails to be convincing or simply is not a priority given our funding interests at the time.

Real Estate Foundation staff members have a sincere desire to support land use-related projects that will make BC communities better places to live, work, and visit. We admire innovation, respect practicality, and very much appreciate receiving grant applications that communicate project needs in an honest, straightforward manner. We encourage all organizations to take the time to ensure that their grant applications represent their projects in the best possible way.