

Arts Grantwriting

The Challenge of Language Ambiguities: The Three "Mis's"

By Suzanne Callahan, CFRE

Feel free to use the words below in your grant proposals. But be aware of the potential for misunderstanding. You may need to explain their context to your project and organization, and constituency.

"Misinterpreted" Words - those with multiple meanings, such that the funder's interpretation might differ from what you intend.

collaboration
community
cultural diversity
important
innovative
mentor
member
outreach
outstanding
partnership
residency
unique
work

"Missed" Words - those that funders may not recognize, particularly as some may not be experts in art, culture or history.

abstract
artistic director
arts-community
audience development
creative process
derivative
dramaturg
figurative
hip-hop
installation
post-modern
presenter
representational
samba
site-specific
performance
sonata

"Misused" Words - those that are sometimes misused by arts organizations.

affect/effect

capital campaign

focus group

goals/strategies

insure/ensure

its/it's

Latin vs. Latino vs. Latina

which/that

Style, to be good, must be clear. Clearness is secured by using words that are current and ordinary. You must disguise your art and give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially. Strange words and invented ones must be used sparingly and on few occasions. The aptness of language is one thing that makes people believe in the truth of your story. Their minds are drawn to the false conclusion that you are to be trusted from the fact that you seem to be talking to them.

— Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, written 2,440 years ago

Suzanne Callahan, CFRE, Founder

1712 I Street, NW, Suite 808, Washington, DC 20006 **TEL** 202.955.8325 **FAX** 202.955.8324

EMAIL callahan@forthearts.org