

CASE STUDY | GRANT ASSISTANT

How CCNY secured \$500,000 with FreeWill's Grant Assistant



THE OPPORTUNITY

The Foundation for City College (CCNY) manages a diverse portfolio of corporate and foundation partners across New York City, the U.S., and globally. These grants advance CCNY's mission of driving growth, fostering opportunity, and supporting student success on one of the nation's most socially mobile campuses.

As Director of Corporate & Foundation Relations, Annika Lüdke oversees the full lifecycle of fundraising — from identifying prospects to stewarding and reporting on gifts. Like many higher education advancement teams, her office faces the constant challenge of doing more with less.

With limited staff capacity, most of her time had been devoted to reporting on existing grants rather than seeking new funding, even though expanding CCNY's grant portfolio remained a top strategic priority. When CCNY pursued a highly competitive \$300,000 grant designed to support students facing urgent needs such as medical bills, childcare costs, or housing instability, the team faced a familiar challenge: time. Drafting, tailoring, and refining proposals often consumed hours each week, limiting their ability to scale outreach and strategy.

THE SOLUTION

CCNY turned to FreeWill's Grant Assistant to rethink their approach to proposal generation and leverage AI support to ideate language, strengthen narrative alignment, and streamline repetitive drafting tasks.

Grant Assistant quickly became a time-saving partner for Annika and her team, helping them compile and organize existing institutional data into a central online library. With this foundation, the team could easily refine, repurpose, and expand content for new opportunities. With Grant Assistant, the team could write more creatively and strategically, guiding each draft to reflect their institutional voice, highlight new impact stories, and align with funder priorities.

FreeWill and Grant Assistant have helped us find new ways to rethink our current grant writing and fundraising strategies. [Grant Assistant] is a great asset for any institution that wants to stay current, be time efficient, be creative, and look for new ways to tell their story.

Annika Lüdke
Director of Corporate Relations & Foundation Grants, The Foundation for City College

THE IMPACT

CCNY successfully secured the \$300,000 annual grant earlier this year, allowing them to provide critical emergency financial support for students.

"Through Grant Assistant, we were able to nudge and edit and make our story more compelling, straightforward, and interesting — to really get the point of need across," Annika explained. "We showcased the campus situation, our student needs, and told that story in a compelling way to a grant provider. [The grant] makes a massive difference for our students."

Since then, the team has secured additional grant wins with Grant Assistant, totaling over \$500,000 in their first year of partnership. Beyond the wins themselves, the team also reports saving a meaningful amount of writing time every week through Grant Assistant, time they now reinvest into cultivation, long-term planning, and portfolio strategy.

RESULTS

40%

reduction in writing time

\$500,000

secured within one year of partnership

5

grants won since implementing Grant Assistant