

9- Tips on Writing a Winning Grant Proposal

Part # 1

Let's begin by defining the word Grant. Grants are sums of money awarded to finance a particular activity or facility. Generally, these grant awards do not need to be paid back. Federal agencies and other organizations sponsor grant programs for various reasons. Before developing a grant proposal, it is vitally important to understand the goals of the particular Federal agency or private organization, and of the grant program itself. This can be accomplished through careful analysis of the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA), Request for Initial Proposals (RFIP) or Request for Applications (RFA) and discussions with the information contact listed in each resource description. Through these discussions an applicant may find that, in order for a particular project to be eligible for funding, the original concept may need to be modified to meet the criteria of the grant program. In allocating funds, programs base their decisions on the applicant's ability to fit its proposed activities within the program's interest areas. It is important for an applicant to become familiar with eligibility requirements and other criteria related to the organization and grant program from which assistance is sought. Applicants should remember that the basic requirements, application forms, information, deadlines and procedures will vary for each grant maker.

Before You Begin Writing the Grant Proposal:

- Rule #1: Believe that someone wants to give you the money!
- Project your organization into the future.
- Start with the end in mind...look at your organization's big picture. Who are you? What are your strengths and priorities?
- Create a plan not just a proposal.
- Do your homework: Research prospective funders. Try and search locally first. Target funding source that has interest in your organization and program.

If you need the money now, you have started too late.

A successful grant proposal is one that is thoughtfully planned, well prepared, and concisely packaged. There are nine basic components in a solid proposal package:

1. Proposal Summary

The proposal summary appears at the beginning of the proposal and outlines the project. It can be a cover letter or a separate page. It should be brief: no longer than two or three paragraphs. It is often helpful to prepare the summary after the proposal has been developed. This makes it easier to include all the key points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. The summary document becomes the foundation of the proposal. The first impression it gives will be critical to the success of the venture. It very possibly could be the only part of the package that is carefully reviewed before the decision is made to consider the project further.

2. Introduction of the Organization

Most proposals require a description of an applicant's organization and its past, present, and projected operations. Be concise, specific and compelling. Use the description to build credibility for your organization. (Start a "credibility" file.) Reinforce the connection between you and the grantor. Establish a context for your problem statement.

IN BRIEF: Who, what, when, why, and how much!

Some features to consider are:

- A brief biography of board members and key staff members,
- The organization's goals, philosophy, and record with other grantors,
- any success stories. The data should be relevant to the goals of the granting organization and its grant program, and should establish the applicant's credibility.

3. Problem Statement

The problem statement (or needs assessment) is a key element of a proposal. It should be a clear, concise, well-supported statement of the problem to be overcome using the grant funding. An applicant could include data collected during a needs assessment that would illustrate the problems to be addressed. The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal.

Zero in on a specific problem you want to solve or an issue you want to address;

Do not make assumptions of the reviewers,

Use statistics to support the existence of your problem or issue,

Make a connection between the issue and your organization,

Make a case for your project locally, not just nationally,

Demonstrate your knowledge of the issue or problem and,

Set-up the milestones of your goals and objectives, address the outcomes you wish to achieve.

4. Project Objectives

The project objectives should clearly describe the goals of the project. Applicants should explain the expected results and benefits of each objective. They should also list the specific criteria of the grant program. Then, describe how the proposal meets each criterion. Goals are general and offer the

evaluator an understanding of the thrust of your program. Objectives are specific, measurable outcomes. They should be realistic and attainable.

Objectives help solve the problem or address the issue. If your objectives make reference to a number -- make sure it is do-able. Do not confuse objectives with methods. Always be realistic.

5. Project Methods or Design

The project method outlines the tasks that will be accomplished with the available resources. It is helpful to structure the project method as a timeline. Early in the planning process, applicants should list the tasks that will have to be completed to meet the goals of the project. They can then break these into smaller tasks and lay them out in a schedule over the grant time period. This will provide a chance to consider what personnel, materials, and other resources will be needed to carry out the tasks.

Describe in detail the activities that will take place in order to achieve desired results. Make sure your methods are realistic. Describe WHY you have chosen these activities. Justify them over all other approaches your organization could have taken. Show your knowledge of the bigger picture. Include a timetable of major milestones.

6. Project Evaluation

Applicants should develop evaluation criteria to evaluate progress towards project goals. It is important to define carefully and exactly how success will be determined. Applicants should ask themselves what they expect to be different once the project is complete. If you are having a problem developing your evaluation process, you better take another look at your objectives. Be ready to begin evaluation as you begin your project.

Summative and Formative Evaluation:

Summative Evaluation is a plan to evaluate the project that measures how you will have met your objectives.

Formative Evaluation is a plan to evaluate the project during and after its execution. It can be used as a tool to make appropriate changes along the way.

7. Future Funding

Applicants may be asked to list expected sources of continuing funding after the conclusion of the grant. The applicant may also be required to list other sources and amounts of funding obtained for the project.

8. The Proposal Budget

Funding sources require different amounts of detail in the budget. Most Federal funding sources require a large amount of detail. Also, they usually provide budget forms with instructions. The budget format presented here is designed to match what most Federal agencies request. If the funding source requires a specific format, you must provide a budget in that format.

Your Budget is an Estimate

Your budget is an estimate. Still, you may not exceed the total amount for the grant. Do not feel you must spend the money to the penny. Your funding source will allow some freedom in spending the money. They might permit requests to change the budget. Such requests must be in writing. A written response becomes a formal "budget modification." The budget modification changes the conditions of the grant. Careful planning will decrease the number of changes that may be required. Also, careful planning shows honesty. This honesty will be necessary to get permission for future changes.

Be Specific

The numbers should be specific. Rounding an item to nearest thousand dollars does not inspire confidence. It also suggests you have not done much work preparing the budget. The reviewer will do a lot of work studying your budget. They expect you to do a lot of work planning the budget. If you round at all, round to dollars, or tens at most. Along the same lines, there is no place in the budget for miscellaneous or contingency items. Your planning should allow for contingencies. For example, a cost of living increase will happen before the grant begins. In this case, you should base salaries on the increased salaries. If you plan to buy equipment, contact the distributor to find out the cost of the equipment when you plan to purchase it. The amount of thought you give to preparing the budget will produce a better program. It will also increase your chances of receiving the grant.



For more resources to help develop your ministry

Visit

www.urbanawarenessusa.org

www.urbanministrytools.org