



Grantsline

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Improve Your Grants Skills For 2008

Happy New Year to all our readers! This issue of Grantsline is devoted to helping you improve your grant skills and prepare for a successful 2008.

"If you don't sweat during the planning, you'll bleed during the implementation."

The Grantsmanship Center

Organize Your Grant Resource Files

Everyone who writes grants has faced a grant deadline and found themselves without a critical piece of information. Prepare for the new year by building grant resource files now before the deadline hits.

Financial

- Articles of Incorporation with amendments or bylaws
- Copies of the past three years 990's
- IRS letter verifying 501(C)(3) status
- Recent audits
- Current annual budget
- Accounting process and procedures
- List of current funding sources

Personnel

- Current list of Board members with short bios
- Board minutes for the past 12 months
- Organizational chart
- Key staff with current resumes
- Employee job descriptions

Agency

- Description and brief history of the agency
- Agency mission, goals, objectives and activities
- Certifications and licenses
- Awards and recognition
- Testimonials from clients
- Press coverage
- Evaluation tools

Data

- Strategic plan and/or needs assessment
- Statistical and census data for geographic area
- Data specific to your target population
- Data to support need for programs/identify gaps
- Contact information for potential evaluators

Community

- Contact info for partner agencies
- Template for letters of support

Great Web Sites:

Tutorial - Writers of Federal Applications

<http://www.theresearchassistant.com/tutorial/index.asp>

Guidebook on Crafting a Grant Proposal

<http://eweb.slu.edu/papers2/grant01v32e.pdf>

Writing a Letter of Inquiry

<http://www.grantproposal.com/inquiry.html>

Start a Dream File

To gear up for your next grant project, start a "Dream File". The dream file can contain articles, best practices, conference materials, or press releases from sister organizations - anything that contains a good program idea that falls within the mission of your organization. If you have the opportunity, expand those dreams into a program outline. Keep the ideas organized by topic, target population or geographic area - whatever makes sense for your organization. When the next funding opportunity presents itself, you will be one step ahead of the game.

Should We Apply For This Grant?

When the next grant opportunity hits your desk - ask yourself the following questions before you start writing:

1. Is your organization eligible to apply?
2. When is the deadline? Given your resources can you realistically make the deadline?
3. Does the amount of available funding match your needs?
4. Do the objectives of the grant program match your program's objectives?
5. How many applicants will there be and what are your chances of being funded?
6. Is there a good match between your organization's mission and the mission of the funding agency?
7. Do you have any conflicts with the values or mission of the funding organization?
8. What outcomes will the grant measure and do you have the means to measure your results?
9. Can you meet the technical requirements once you are funded?

By carefully evaluating a grant opportunity, your efforts are more likely to be a success.

Introduce Your Organization

An effective introduction sells the funder on your organization. You must convince them that your organization is most qualified to address the issues important to that funding agency. Some basics that all potential funders are likely to look for include:

- The mission statement
- The board members
- The target population and how many are served annually
- Historical accomplishments
- Performance measures used by the organization
- Evidence that the organization collaborates in community
- Financial capacity and stability of the organization

While conveying the above, remember your audience. Each introduction will be a little different and should emphasize different facts depending on the reader.

Recent Grant Awards:

Carroll County Farm Museum

Museum Enhancement Grant

Carroll County Department of Citizen Services

HUD Continuum of Care Funding
Safe Haven
Permanent Supportive Housing
Shelter Plus Care
Supportive Services

Human Services Programs

Community Foundation of Carroll County - Cold Weather Shelter Funds

Writing a Letter of Inquiry

Funding agencies frequently request a letter of inquiry prior to inviting a full grant proposal. The letter of inquiry, usually no more than 2-3 pages, allows an agency to test an idea with a funder to be certain that there is a strong match between the program goals and the funder's goals. In addition, if an agency is invited to submit a full proposal, they can receive feedback from the funder before finalizing the proposal. A letter of inquiry can save time and effort as well. If the proposal is rejected, an agency hasn't gone to great lengths to craft an application. And, if it is accepted, the ground work is in place for the application.

One way to approach a letter of inquiry is to assign a question to each paragraph.

Paragraph 1 - Who are you? - Describe yourself and your agency, include your mission, who you serve and where you are located

Paragraph 2 - Why this agency? - Show your knowledge of the funding agency's goals and priorities.

Paragraph 3 - What is the need? - Include a brief but clear problem statement with supporting statistics.

Paragraph 4 - What's the plan? - Bullet the plan's goals and objectives

Paragraph 5 - Why fund you? - Highlight your agency's unique qualifications

Paragraph 6 - How much? - Specify the amount requested in broad budget categories and include other funding sources.

Paragraph 7 - Closing - Provide contact information and enclose brochures and fact sheets.

The Perfect Proposal

Writing the perfect proposal is more of an art than a science; however, the following components are almost always found in a good application:

1. Clear explanation of the proposed project's primary and secondary objectives.
2. Well thought-out plan for developing the project.
3. Strategies to be used to implement the project.
4. Explanation of the expected results.
5. Methodology to be used for evaluation including the criteria.
6. Accounting of non-monetary or other financial support devoted to the project.
7. Sustainability plan
8. Outline of any technical assistance committed to or needed by the project.
9. Executive summary that focuses on the needs the project will address without the distraction of the supporting documentation.
10. For non-profits: information about the organization, annual budget, board of directors and the IRS determination letter

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Web Page

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Writing an Outstanding Summary

Your proposal summary is one of the first pieces of information about your project that a reviewer will see. A well-written summary will effectively “sell” your idea to the potential funder, and by making a good first impression, your proposal will survive the elimination process and move to the next level of review. A well-written summary is brief and concise but thoroughly describes:

- Background of the project
- Project goals and objectives
- Unique features of the project
- Approach or plan of action
- Plans for evaluation
- Significance of proposed project

While you must adhere strictly to the space limits, make good use all of the space that is allocated to the summary.

Building a Better Budget

Many reviewers look at the budget before going to the narrative. Do your budgets tell your story? Can your budget and the accompanying narrative stand on its own? Is the budget realistic? Does the budget include everything you will need to run an effective program? Does the budget include unrelated items or raise any red flags for the reviewer?

The grant budget can tell a reviewer a lot about the proposed program. A well-planned and well-documented budget shows that the agency applying for funds has a clear understanding of the requirements of an effective and cost efficient program. In addition, a well-thought out budget will support the narrative and the project components will be tied to budget items. The budget and the budget narrative may also give you another chance to tell your story without counting towards the overall page limit.

Prepare in advance for the next grant budget by keeping current information on cost categories most common to a grant application including:

- Salaries and fringe benefits
- Travel including allowable mileage
- Equipment and supplies
- Professional services including consultants and evaluators
- Value of rental space and volunteers
- Indirect costs – utilities, rent, insurance
- Program income

Measuring Outcomes and Selecting Indicators

A good example of a comprehensive use of detailed indicators is produced by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. [Vital Signs IV](#) measures progress in 55 Baltimore City neighborhoods by tracking a series of 40 outcome indicators. The indicators were selected based on how useful they were to the community as well as the availability and quality of the available data. [Vital Signs IV](#) follows indicators in the seven categories:

- Housing and Community Development
- Children and Family Health, Safety and Well-being
- Workforce and Economic Development
- Sanitation
- Urban Environment and Transit
- Education and Youth
- Neighborhood Action and Sense of Community

The guiding principal behind the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance is “A community that does not know itself can not improve.” The same can be said for an organization. All organizations are challenged to select indicators that accurately reflect the success of their programs.

For more information and to view the report go to:

<http://www.ubalt.edu/bnia/indicators/reports.html>

Letters of Support

Strong letters of support are critical to a successful grant application. To make the process easier, applicant agencies should supply partner agencies with an outline containing all the information they will need to write an effective letter of support.

Heading - Check the grant guidelines, but most letters of support will be addressed to the granting agency. The partner agency should be provided with the name and address of the granting agency, as well as the language for the subject line including the grant title and project title.

Opening Paragraph - In the first paragraph, the partner agency should include a brief description of their agency, the nature of their relationship with the applicant agency and a short description of the grant project.

Paragraph 2 - The partner agency should detail the type of contribution they will make to the project - staff, cash or in-kind support, referrals etc. More detail is required if the partner agency is supplying any part of the match.

Paragraph 3 - The letter can also describe any ongoing collaborative efforts between partner and applicant agencies.

Closing - Finally, the partner agency should include contact information for any follow-up questions.

