

LIFE 2010 Statewide Conference Presentation

Session: Grant Writing 101 – the Nuts and Bolts of a Successful Proposal

Wednesday: May 19, 2010: 10:15 – 11:30 and 1:00 – 2:15

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- Introduction
- What do we want to accomplish today
- General thoughts about the grant writing process: Handout 1
- General outline of key components of common grant proposals: Handout 2
- General thoughts about writing and submitting your grant application: Handout 3
- How can you increase your chances for funding – what you should look for when reading your last draft – making your grant more competitive
- The writing process/being proactive instead of reactive/looking for funding sources

Handout 1: General thoughts about the grant seeking process – there is more to it than just writing the grant application

- We can approach the process of grant writing by looking at a series of questions – questions you will eventually have to address/answer to write a competitive grant
- Even if you don't have a particular funding source in mind – thinking about these questions will help to get you started
- We want to look at what goes into an excellent proposal – keep in mind that there is not enough money to support all projects that are worthy of funding – our primary goal is to write a very competitive grant
- What is your grant all about/does it address an important problem/need/opportunity at your institution/agency or in your community - why is it important – why should we care about your project – who will benefit – how will they benefit – what will change
- Does the proposed project fall within your organization's mission/priorities
- Can your organization (staff, experience, and resources) demonstrate that it is capable of implementing the proposed project – what can you include about your agency/institution that will contribute to the success of the proposed project
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your institution/agency with regards to this particular grant application – what can you include: access to community resources, managed similar grants, administrative support, equipment, computer resources, maintenance of equipment, training resources, volunteers, etc
- What population will you serve, why this particular population, can you gain access to this population, have you had previous experience working with this population
- Have there been other attempts to solve this problem by your institution or agency/what were the results – are others in your community attempting to address this problem
- For some grants you may have to address sustainability issues – what happens after you have successfully conducted the project – what is the next step

Handout 2: Key Components of Common Grant Proposals

- Need/Problem/Opportunity: What problem do you plan to address
- Goals/Objectives: What do you expect to accomplish
- Plan of Operation: How will you conduct/manage your project
- Evaluation Plan: How will you measure success
- Budget: What resources will you need, why do you need them, what will it cost

Need/Problem/Opportunity – What need/problem/opportunity do you plan to address - why is it important to address it

- You must demonstrate that you know the current situation as it relates to the identified problem – this information will serve as a baseline from which you can measure progress
- Where can you access information, databases, public documents, studies, community assessments, surveys to help you develop and document the need/problem statement – start collecting this information as soon as possible – be sure your data are accurate and the most recent available
- In the need section you might have to demonstrate that you understand what others are doing to address/alleviate the problem – what has worked - what hasn't worked
- The need to be addressed should have some clear relationship to your organization's mission and purpose – and be consistent with the scope of your organization's ability/experience to respond to the need/problem
- When developing your needs statement take into consideration the type of reviewer who will be reading your proposal – because those who live with the problem every day see the problem so clearly they think it should be obvious to others – you might have to put your need/problem/opportunity into context for the reviewers
- Grant seekers sometimes describe a need as something that their organization lacks - problems are almost always focused on a target population – the need should be stated in terms of your client's needs/problems – not the applicant's
- Most groups move to soon to the solution stage before they understand why they have a problem – make sure you are talking about a true problem, not a symptom – you cannot move to the solution without first defining the need

Goals/Objectives – what you expect to accomplish - the focus of your grant proposal: Goals and objectives provide the funding source/reviewers with a clear picture of the results of implementing your project – what will change. Methods and activities tell them how you propose to achieve the goals and objectives

- A goal is a broad-based statement of the ultimate result. Project goals are often part of a long-range planning process, often unreachable, especially in the short term. A goal states the broad intention of an objective
- Objectives state what your project expects to achieve in a defined period of time: each is or should be an extension of your need section. In the need section you describe the current situation – where you are starting from - objectives describe what the situation will be after you have implemented your proposed project
- An objective is a measurable step you propose to take to narrow or close the gap between what is and what ought to be - it tells the funding source what will change - it emphasizes what will be done and when it will be done – not why (you took care of that in the Need section) or how it will be done – you will take care of that in the Plan of Operation

- You should determine how you will measure change - if you don't have a reasonable clearly defined way to measure change – you may have to rethink your objective
- What objectives should you include in your grant application: usually the purpose of the grant and/or your need dictates your objectives; but sometimes they are given to you by the funding source
- Questions related to each objective: if you achieve this objective – will it have an impact on the need/problem you described; is the objective measurable, realistic and attainable considering the resources you have available

Plan of operation/methods/activities: How will you conduct and/or manage your project

- How will you show/document that you can manage the proposed project and implement the proposed project plan/activities – and that you have the necessary support/resources from your agency/institution and/or the community
- What resources/facilities will you need to run this project – how much will the project cost - what is your plan to monitor spending/your financial management plan
- What is your timeline for implementing individual project activities and evaluating the results of your project – most funding sources require a timeline for major events
- What staff will you need to conduct and evaluate the project – what qualifications and/or experience will they need – how will you hire/train/supervise staff - will they need any special training and/or special skills
- If your project involves volunteers – how will you recruit, train, and manage them
- Your records management system – record keeping system, collection and storage of data/information, concerns about confidentiality – and maybe your plans for what will happen to the data/information at the conclusion of the project – your plans to share the information and/or to destroy it
- The extent to which the proposed project encourages involvement by particular groups (will depend upon the type of project) – and your plans to gain access to and recruit from a particular population
- If your proposed project includes other partners - what is your plan to coordinate project activities: the roles and responsibilities of each partner; procedures for making decisions on the direction of project activities; fiscal and management coordination; procedures for resolving disputes/conflicts; information sharing and communication among partners

Evaluation plan: How will you know if you were successful – how do you plan to evaluate your project - did you meet your goals and/or objectives

- What data/information will you collect and analyze to evaluate the results of your project - how long will it take to collect the required data – why will it take this long – what resources will you need – do you have access to the data/information - remember something that looks easy or hard to you and your staff might not appear to be easy (or hard) to the reviewers
- What methods tools/instruments will you use to collect data – why these particular methods/tools/instruments – have you used them before – have other agencies conducting similar projects used them in the past – the results of your evaluation will only be as good as the methods/techniques and instruments you use and your baseline data – you should have good information about where you will be starting from
- Does the funding source have required forms or procedures in place that you will be required to incorporate into your evaluation plan

- Will you need any outside assistance when designing data collection instruments, using standard data collection instruments and/or interpreting data – maybe a data collection instrument/survey needs to be designed/interpreted by someone with special training
- What potential problems could you encounter while collecting data in some cases it might be advantageous to do a trial run or collect preliminary data/information – you might discover some problems you hadn't anticipated
- If you didn't achieve your objectives you probably should have a plan in place to take a look at why you didn't achieve your objectives – but even when you do achieve them you will want to know what factors contributed to your success
- To what extent does your evaluation plan provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment (interim targets/benchmarks) of progress toward achieving your intended outcome/objectives
- How will you use performance feedback to assess your progress toward achieving your intended outcomes

Budget: What resources will you need to run the project, why do you need them, what will it cost

- What resources will you need to run the project/what resources do you already have access to/what additional resources will you need and why
- Steps in the budget development process: what resources do you need and why – what costs will the funding agency allow/not allow – what can you use from in-house resources and/or alternate sources
- What will your project cost/why will it cost this much – make sure that your budget is adequate to carry out the proposed project and keep the budget realistic – but don't overlook any expenses – your proposed work plan/activities drives the budget
- Does your budget reflect your narrative – is everything mentioned in your proposal in the budget – explain any unusual items
- Do you need to provide matching costs - what will the funding source allow you to use as matching costs – how will you be required to document and track them
- Justify the need for each position, travel, equipment – everyone included on the budget should have a clearly defined and justifiable role on the proposed project
- For budget justification: why is each person on the grant, what is their role and responsibilities (job description), what percent of their time will be spent on the project
- Funding agencies want to know who will travel, why they need to travel, how it benefits the project – a detailed work plan makes it easier to justify travel requirements
- Who at your institution/agency can help you prepare your budget – who at your agency needs to see the final budget and sign off on it
- If the project requires multiple years of funding – what activities take place in subsequent years – be sure the timetable reflects this – want the reviewers to see what will be done and when over the entire period of the grant – if there are significant changes between years – justify why these changes are necessary

Handout 3: General thoughts about writing and submitting your grant application

- You will have strict page limits and formatting requirements – find ways to be brief while providing the necessary information – very important to focus on relevant information – when editing – ask yourself if we left this out – how does it affect my argument
- How will the grant be reviewed/how informed will the reviewers be about the general area of the proposed project – grant proposals should be developed so that the reviewers and the funding source will understand what you are proposing to do with their money
- Request the application guidelines from the funding source, review them thoroughly, clarify questions – if necessary contact the funding source: need to know what the funding source is looking for – make sure you can address their priorities – funders want to fund projects they are interested in – know what funds can and cannot be used for
- You must ask yourself – can our agency adequately address the purpose of the funding announcement – if we implement the proposed project how will it aid us to achieve our mission
- Why is your proposed project important to the funding agency
- Who at your institution/agency will need to review your proposal and budget; who will have to sign off on it – how much lead time will they need
- Determine what outside help you will need: data; letters of support or commitment from other organizations
- Great grant writing can't overcome a mediocre idea – but the essence of a great idea can be torpedoed by a sloppy presentation in the grant application or by not addressing the specific questions/requirements posed by the funding agency
- Have one person edit the final proposal – don't want the proposal to look like it was written by a committee – if possible get a copy of a previous submitted proposal
- Have someone not familiar with your proposal read it – get critical feedback – allow others to challenge your ideas and your presentation of your ideas
- What documents, records, strategic plans does your agency have that you can quote from or take information from
- Funding sources (Federal, State, Private/Community Foundations, Corporate, etc) want to provide funding for grants that solve problems, address important issues, and/or that meet their mission/priorities – it is in their best interest to see that quality proposals are submitted
- You will submit the proposal online or by mail (moving towards having most grants being submitted online) – make sure you have included all the required forms and documents – don't wait until the last minute for online submissions