

Grantseeking from Foundations

Before You Begin, Plan!

This tip sheet offers a brief overview of the grantseeking process and offers some thoughts to help your planning.

The guiding principle

Successful grantseeking programs are guided by the understanding that grantmakers and grantseekers are partners working together to serve their community. The relationship between them is an equation of two equal parts. Both sides of the equation exist to serve the community's needs, a calling greater than their own interests.

The grantmaker/grantseeker relationship gains strength when there is a shared belief in the values of openness, mutual respect and trust. Stressful to this relationship is the fact that the legitimate need for funds is always greater than the dollars available. It is important to keep the focus of this relationship clear—with the belief that the relationship will be a long-term one.

Keys to success

What makes a nonprofit organization successful will also make its grantseeking program successful. This includes:

- Clear, compelling vision shared by the board, staff and key constituencies.
- Demonstrated commitment to excellence in all areas of governance and operations.
- Outstanding programs and services for which there is great need and high demand.
- Defined and measurable organizational, programmatic and financial goals.
- Ongoing program and financial planning and evaluation, the results of which are used to improve the program.

You can't make up in writing what you missed in planning: For too many organizations, the grantseeking process begins by sitting down to write the proposal. In fact, this is the final step of a much longer process that begins when the nonprofit organization develops its strategic and operating plans and the financial strategy and budget needed to support them. Key to this planning process is the identification of the program goals, objectives, action plans and budgets appropriate for grant funding.

Identify the way you intend to pay for these programs: List programs and sources of funds to pay for them. Be clear about the ways particular funds can be used. Grant funds are primarily awarded to begin or expand a program. List the expenses for each program, including percentages of each appropriate staff members' time, and agency resources that will be used both directly and indirectly to support the program. Identify all the funding that is in place for the agency and allocate it appropriately according to the wishes of the donors or other fiduciary agents. Then identify the gaps in support and appropriate ways to fill in those gaps. For example, while overhead can sometimes be charged to a grant application, foundation and corporate funders will not usually support a request for operating support unless it is a general purpose or operating support grant.

Build a grantmaker's library: Begin by developing a list of all grantmakers interested in funding the type of programs offered by your organization. Contact funders and request their annual report, application guidelines and forms, and any other information they have available.

Collect as much additional information about each funder from sources such as their 990 PFs at www.Guidestar.org, foundation directories, journals, newspapers, and the annual reports of other nonprofit organizations.

Find the match: Compile a master list of prospective funders in the form of a spreadsheet showing each funder, their funding interest areas, typical grant amounts, application deadlines, previous grants made to your organization, etc.

Compare the programs you identified as appropriate for grant funding and match them with the funders' interest areas. (Obviously, not every funder will be a match with your needs.)

Create a calendar: Use the list of funders determined to be a good match with your needs to create a grantseeking calendar. Develop a detailed strategy and timeline for approaching each funder. Your strategy is likely to include a telephone or in-person discussion with the prospective funder to determine if they agree that there is a good match between your needs and their interests.

Preparing the proposal: When preparing the proposal be very clear about exactly Why? What? When? How? How much? (**Funders often comment that even after thoroughly reading a proposal, they cannot discern exactly what the applicants want!**)

- **Why (vision):** Why are you seeking funds? What will be made possible if you receive these funds? Focus on what will be different for the people you serve, not your organization.
- **What and when—goals, objectives, timeline and evaluation:** Exactly what will be accomplished with the funds you are granted, when will you do it and how will you know you have been successful?
- **How and how much—action plan and budget:** What specific activities will you undertake in order to achieve your goals and objectives? How much will it cost to carry out your plan and how much of that total cost are you requesting? If not requesting full funding, explain where you will find the rest of the required funding. How will you support this need when the grant period is over?

Make sure the budget you present is adequate to accomplish the proposed project. An unrealistically low budget may make the funder question your ability to realize your objectives. Don't play games with your budget by inflating it and asking for more than you need assuming the funder will award less than you request.

Grantwriting tips: If you cannot write a 2- to 3-sentence statement that clearly summarizes why, what, when, how and how much—go back and check your program plans. Proposals most often fail because their sponsoring organization has not fully developed and planned the project for which they are seeking funds.

- **Follow all of the funder's instructions**, if the funder wants proposals in a specific format, do it. If the funder wants particular questions answered in a particular order, do it. **Also, be sure to include all attachments as requested by the funder. If you don't have a requested item, be sure to explain why.**
- **State your request clearly** at the beginning of the proposal. Don't bury it in the middle.
- **Write for the reader** and make the proposal easy to read. Choose a legible type font in a reasonable size. *Avoid jargon and acronyms.* Write in a professional style that is factual and engaging (avoid the first-person or passive voice). Divide the proposal into sections. Number the pages and use a table of contents.

FINALLY: Remember that grantseekers and grantmakers are equal partners in creating solutions to community needs. Treat your funders as you would like them to treat you.