

A grant in the crowd

With all the competition out there for grant funding, it's essential to make sure your proposal stands out in the crowd.

By Chad Gallagher

When pursuing grant dollars there are many ways to enhance your application and improve your chances for success. As I've stressed in previous articles, the most important steps in the grant process occur before you ever read a grant's Request for Proposal (RFP). You must prepare by developing a community needs assessment and a community blueprint. These documents are the foundation of your grant application, and both will position a municipality for sustained grant writing success.

You must continue, however, to take steps to make your grant application stand out even after these documents are in place. Amidst a slew of competing grants, there are some lesser known but highly effective techniques that work to give the grant panel a more favorable view of your grant.

Knowledge is power

First, get to know the agency or organization that you are going to be seeking funding through. Find out the key players, the agency's mission, current priorities and the organization's mission and special interests. Get a list of recent successfully funded projects and a copy of successful applications. If some of the past successful recipients are not competing in the new funding cycle you can call them and discuss their effort, experience and success. Ask for a meeting with grant officials to discuss how well your need fits into their vision and funding priorities. Researching and getting to know the funding organization will demonstrate your sincerity and interest in success to the funding entity.

This same kind of research is important even after you have been denied a grant. Contact with the funding agency that denied your request. Ask them for a meeting. Ask for the review score sheets and notes as well. Find out why you were turned down. It is important to know if your application was declined because they simply had better requests, your need was secondary to their mission statement, or because there were flaws and errors to in your application. A willingness to learn from these mistakes can significantly help in your next round with the same funding entity, as well as with other future applications.

Let's be clear

A second way to make your grant stand out is by clearly identifying the problem to be addressed along with necessary facts and documentation. It is important that your facts be neatly documented and well organized. Yet you must not stop here. Your grant application cannot be just a highlight of the problems your community is facing. The application must also clearly articulate creative solutions to the identified challenges. Your application must be credible, valid and substantial, but it must also be creative.

Funding agencies and private foundations are looking for creative and unique solutions to common challenges and crises. Your solutions must be practical and achievable but they should be as creative as possible. Look for bold and daring solutions

that can often be simple adjustments to the common answers for municipal and community challenges. Innovative thinking will turn the heads of proposal reviewers.

Partner up

A third effective grant application technique is to collaborate with private sector partners to overcome obstacles. Collaboration is a powerful tool in community building and one that has been tremendously under utilized. Be willing to say you lack certain skills and abilities and will therefore be partnering with another community or someone in the private sector who can provide needed professional assets. The broader the impact is, the more appealing your application becomes to funding entities.

Get specific

A fourth and final way to make your grant stand out is to be persuasive and compelling in your narrative. Above all, be specific and be factual. Identify and counter specific problems with specific solutions. Stating a broad, well-known problem without breaking it down can make your application seem naïve and cause a reviewer to assume you are unaware of the architecture of the problem, not to mention the necessary solution. Do not exaggerate or state claims that you cannot back up if asked. By being specific and factual you build trust with the reviewer that is needed to move your application to the next stage.

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