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Grant Writing: Giving it Your Best Shot

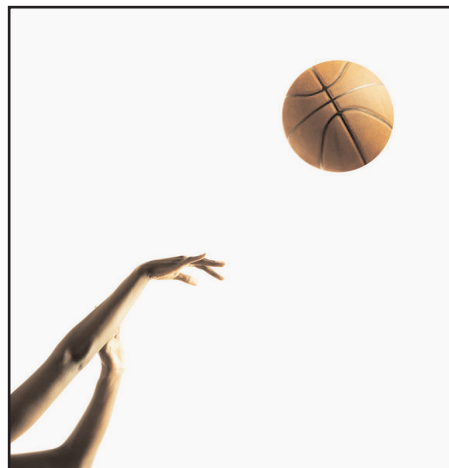
Applying for a grant in an economic downturn can seem like an unlikely long shot. But securing funding is far from impossible. Foundations alone awarded \$32 billion in grants in 2008, according to Foundation Center and Giving USA estimates. And while funding is down significantly over recent years, grants continue to be a major funding source, helping scores of charities fulfill their missions and stay afloat. Federal, state, local and corporate grants add to funding opportunities.

Get the ball rolling

Your first step is to research the grants that are available. You can find a mountain of information about funders' requirements online. And while seeking a funder with a mission similar to yours is helpful, you'll want to match your project to your grantor's priorities rather than the other way around. Also keep an eye on location. Some foundations award grants nationwide while others focus on specific geographic areas. Start with applications to local funders and then branch out.

Think broadly

Stay open to all types of grant sources — not only private foundations, but also



local, state and federal governments and corporations. Also look for "mini-grants," small funding amounts typically available from corporations and not-for-profits. As funders have cut back, mini-grants have replaced heftier grants in some cases. But a "mini" may be enough to fund a need.

Also, consider applying for a grant with one or more like organizations. Collaborative projects have grown in popularity with grantors in recent years. Funders are attracted to collaboration benefits such as avoiding project duplication, expanding staff resources and the geographic area served, and multiorganizational oversight.

Write well — and smart

Make every word in the proposal count, and follow the length requirements to a "T." Write for an intelligent reviewer, not for an expert in the field; a common mistake is losing the reader by introducing ideas that are too complex. Ask one or two of your board members to read the proposal before you submit it.

What you want to do is grab the reader's attention about your project. Simple and direct language will work best. Do, however, echo some of the funder's own key words that you discovered during the research phase.

Sell your project

Like its length, the format and information required in your grant proposal will vary by funder. But every funder typically seeks answers to these questions:

Who is this organization? Convincing the funding source that it can trust you with its money is key. Establish your organization's credibility by explaining its mission, major accomplishments, and endorsements. Include other projects that have been funded and expound on their successful outcomes.

(continued)

What are the project's goals? Give a well-defined, outcome-based goal or goals for your project. Desired outcomes should be measurable. For example, let's say yours is a literacy organization seeking funding for its tutoring program. You might state, "The project is designed to increase the reading proficiency of students by at least two grade levels in one year."

Why is the project needed? Describe data-driven problems or needs. For example, using credible data, the literacy organization might state that "20% of the adult population in Anytown, USA, has a reading level below the third grade."

How will the goals be reached? Describe key activities and project specifics. For example, "150 adult students will receive three hours of one-on-one English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring once per week at the Anytown, USA, Public Library." If available, include any research that supports the pairing of your proposed activities with the desired results.

How will the funds be used? For example, the literacy organization might plan to purchase a textbook and workbook aimed at each student's

literacy level and pay for the time of three qualified instructors. Be sure to supply itemized estimates of such costs.

How will the outcomes be measured? Offer proof that you've obtained the results you were after. (Some grantors, though, will be satisfied if you've made progress in that direction or learned from the experience.) The literacy organization, for example, could cite the standard test it plans to use to evaluate each student's reading progress.

What about the future? Describe how your project is sustainable, scalable, and reproducible in case you want to re-create or upgrade the project and expand it to different locations in the future.

Put it all together

Developing a winning grant proposal requires diligent research, strong writing and enough factual information to enable the grantor to make a decision.

It also calls for the ability to assimilate what the grantor is looking for and how your organization's project fills that bill. **h**

The Extra Effort

Once you've selected a grant opportunity that's a good fit for your organization, read the funder's guidelines until you fully understand what's required. Then contact the grantor to get an even better feel for what it seeks in a project. The funding source may be more than willing to provide insights into its funding process and point you to previous, successful grant applications.

Moreover, talking directly with the grantor can shed light on your chances of actually securing a grant. It's better to find out upfront whether developing a proposal for this funding source may simply be a waste of time.

Also take the time to determine if any extra administrative costs would accompany accepting the funds. There could be, for example, additional expenses for added cost reporting or audit requirements.

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