

Quick Tips for Grant Writers

Tip #1 - Give your group a business image makeover - Today's grant makers are paying more attention to the ability of a grant seeker to deliver upon their promise of a successful project. Developing management expertise and sound accounting practices will tell potential grant makers that your group is a good risk.

Tip # 2 - Develop Good Projects - A former boss of mine used to tell prospective grantees "We fund projects, not ideas!" What this statement really means is that every detail needs to be well thought out, budgeted and verified before submitting an application. I tell grant seekers that they need to break their projects into individual tasks. When each task is assigned to it budget, deadline, responsible person and a method for determining whether or not the task is completed they are then ready to think about looking for grants.

Tip # 3 - Become Tech Savvy - Both government and private grant makers are using the internet to screen and gather applications and collect administrative information. Grant seekers need both a fast internet connection (DSL or better) and a computer that won't freeze while using the internet. Another thing to watch for is the differences between the printed page and an online submittal box. What really looks nice on paper may look terrible when copied and pasted into box. Pay extra attention to proof reading when filling out an online grant application.

Tip # 4 - Build Partnerships – I've said it before and I will say it again, grant makers are risk averse creatures. Anything you can do to mitigate that risk will improve your success. Partnerships are an excellent tool for increasing the pool of available resources while reducing risk. This is especially true when a newly formed or inexperienced group is going after a grant. Partnering with a group with a good track record of success will alleviate the fear that a grant maker may have with working with an inexperienced group.

Tip # 5 - Timeliness is next to ..- Patience is not a virtue for those of us who work for grant makers. Our bosses are always on our case to closeout projects. So to keep our bosses happy those of us in the grant making business seek projects that we are certain will quickly be completed. I go by a 24-month rule. If a project can't be reasonably finished within 24 months of being funded, then it is too big and needs to be broken down into phases or smaller projects.

Tip # 6 - Don't Lie - Those of us that work in grant making arena are cynical and distrustful of every proposal we review. Grant reviewers take pride in catching liars and often bet big money with colleagues to see who can catch the most lies. The other thing you should know about the grant making community is that we like, no let me strike that, we LOVE to gossip. So the bottom line is don't lie or even fudge facts, figures and timelines. You will get caught and everyone will know. Not only will lying hurt you but through guilt by association hurt the reputations of similar groups.

Tip # 7 - Ask Questions? – The only stupid question is the one that goes unasked. Ask questions early, often and until you are blue in the face.

Tip # 8 - A good need statement will... - Most applications will ask for some sort of need or purpose statement. Even though the application guidelines may not explicitly say so most grant makers want you to..

- Explain why your community/constituency needs the proposed project.
- Describe what will happen if your project isn't funded or is delayed?
- Use numbers to quantify the problem or issue.
- Show that your community/constituency is more needed than others seeking the same grant.
- Avoid generic statements.

Tip # 9 - A good project description will... - A common mistake found in most project descriptions or scopes is that they are written in technical language. Who are we kidding grant writers are lazy and it is easier to copy and paste a consultant or engineer's description than taking the time to write or adapt their own. Because we are essentially cowards those of us in the grant making world will use boards and volunteer reviewers to do our dirty work for us. On rare occasions we will find folks who know the subject matter better than we do but those instances are rare. So to maximize the chance that the reviewers reading your application will stay awake. ALWAYS USE PLAIN ENGLISH! Additionally, a good project description or scope will tell the reviewer...

- What you are doing?
- Where are you doing it (attach maps)?
- How much are you doing?
- How are you doing it (staff, contractors, consultants, volunteers)?

Tip # 10 - Triple Check the numbers - If lying grant writers are the scum of the earth, mathematically challenged grant writers are their first cousins. Nothing says "We can't be trusted" better than a grant application chalk full of budget errors and inconsistencies. To leave no doubt that you did indeed graduate from the third grade make sure your numbers are...

- Consistent- Make sure your budget numbers match budget figures in other parts of the application.
- Accurate - Triple check your math.
- Documented - Budget figures should be supported by studies, and empirical data.
- Screened for hidden administrative cost - This is especially important when working with government grants since they may contain prevailing wage (Davis-Bacon) or environmental review requirements.

Tip # 11 - Matching funds - Even if it isn't required documenting matching funds goes a long way to elevate your proposal above the crowd. Matching funds tell the grant maker that your board, community and constituents are fully invested in the project and committed to its long-term sustainability and success. In the event of cost overruns, matching funds alleviate fears that your group isn't prepared for the unexpected. Many grant opportunities requiring match will allow you to use a combination of cash, other grants and volunteer efforts to meet minimum thresholds. If using volunteer services as part of your match, check with the grant maker to see if they have any special rules, rates or record keeping requirements for counting volunteer or in-kind match.

Tip # 12 - Deadlines - This can be confusing. Some grant notices will list a date and not say if it is a "postmark" of an "on my desk" deadline. Unless otherwise stated assume that any listed

deadline is an "on my desk" deadline. If hand delivering your application, make sure you note the person accepting your application and ask them to date stamp or date and initial each copy of your proposal and ask for a receipt.

Tip # 13 – *Follow up* - Contact the grant maker three working days after the submittal deadline to see if your grant made it on time or if there are any immediate clarifications that need to take place.

Tip # 14 – *Rejection* - A loser isn't someone who is unsuccessful, a loser is someone who does not turn failure or rejection into a learning opportunity. It is not personal. There is never enough money to fund every request. Ask for feedback and find out if there are some fixes that will make the proposal better the 2nd time around. Look for other sources of funding.

Tip #15 - *Don't confuse grant making with fundraising* - Most grant makers want to fund new and innovative programs and projects that are sustainable after closeout. If you are looking for grants to make payrolls and pay the rent, then you are wasting your time. Most grant makers will not provide funding for operations and many will not allow funding for grant writing or administrative expenses.

Tip #16 - *Thank Before You Bank* - Successful grant seeking is about building relationships. A good thanking strategy lays the foundation for future grants. Every grant seeking effort should be followed up by thanking...

- Individuals - Start with the individual(s) who answered your questions and assisted you through the process. To really stand out use the old fashion handwritten note.
- Bosses – Thank the managers, boards, and CEOs of the organization providing the grant. Mention by name the individual(s) who helped you through the process.
- Organization - Offer a public thank you to the organization providing you with a grant. The thank may take the form of an ad, an acknowledgement on your website, social media, newsletters, formal letter and/or all of the above.

Compiled by Jerry Miller, Idaho Department of Commerce
Email: Jerry.miller@commerce.idaho.gov Phone: (208) 287-0780