

Grants Workshop Hosted by Congresswoman Susan Davis
August 26, 2009

Best Practices for Grantseekers

- Research is key – you want to make sure that your program is a fit for the foundation to which you are applying. One indicator of match is to look at the types of programs the foundation has funded in the past.
- If possible, speak to someone at the foundation if you are unsure if your program would be a good match. If the foundation has a grants manager or grants administrator, start there. You can also talk to a program staff person.
- If the foundation has a website, make sure to review the proposal submission guidelines carefully. Don't rely on your memory, for example, you may have submitted to a foundation in the past but the number of copies of the proposals they require you to submit has changed. Don't let little mistakes make a bad impression at the very beginning.
- If you are requesting funds for a new program, what is your basis for creating the program? Why does your organization think that a program like this is necessary? Did you get input from clients on the design of the program? This is key! If the program is ongoing, include evaluation results in your request. You want to make a strong case for the foundation to move your proposal to the next stage and one good way to do that is by talking about the program's successes.
- Write the proposal in a clear and concise manner. Make sure to answer all the questions asked or include all requested information. This is not the time to make a bad first impression. Spell peoples' names correctly. It's worth taking extra time to make sure titles, degrees, and addresses are correct. Have someone else who is not familiar with the program read the proposal before you submit it. Don't *assume* that foundation staff will know what you're talking about because you never know who will be reading your proposal. It could be select members from the board for example.
- Define the specific language that you use. What "high-risk" means for your organization may not be the same as what "high-risk" means to me!
- Having multiple funding sources is more appealing for foundations. A foundation doesn't usually want to be the sole funding source for a program because what happens to the program when the funding ends? It's a disservice to clients to offer a program and provide services that they need and then stop providing those services once funding ends.
- Also, be aware of the illusion of "double dipping". You want to make sure to mention in your proposal that you are seeking funds from other funding sources. I'm always surprised to hear from applicants/non-profits that they don't realize that funders talk to each other. For example, you don't want two funders who you've requested funds from to be talking, asking each other what the other is currently working on, and then find out that both of their foundations are being asked to support the same thing, for example, the same staff person. What happens if you get funding from both of those foundations? It's going to look like poor planning if you've

asked multiple foundations to support the same budget line items and then you immediately have to go back to and ask for a budget revision. The foundation may think you're trying to pull a fast one.

- If you work with other organizations on the program that you are requesting funds for, describe that collaboration in your proposal. Funders like to see organizations working together. Remember, it all comes down to the clients – are the clients receiving the services that they need? Unless your organization provides everything, talk about how you work with other organizations. But the key here is to DEFINE what you mean by collaboration because it's on a continuum. On one end there is referring your clients to other organizations for services to having employees from different organizations “triaging” clients and really work together, hand in hand, to make sure clients' needs are being met.
- Evaluation is like holding a mirror up to your program. It's an organized strategy for the collection of information to assess the effectiveness of a program. Is your program meeting its goals and objectives? Can your program be improved? If so, how? What is the best course of action for improvement? Evaluation provides continuous monitoring and quality improvement.
- Know the difference between Goals and Objectives! **Goals** are broad, general statements which provide direction for writing your objectives. Goals are stated in terms of desired long-term optimal outcomes or global impact of the program. Several objectives may fit under one goal. Goal example: Reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by 10% in San Diego County between 2010 and 2012.
- **Objectives** are what you hope your activities will achieve. They are measurable, attainable, and time-referenced end results related to a goal. Objective example: #1) Conduct three 2-hour sessions to train 100 personnel about child abuse and neglect by March 31, 2010. Objective #2) 90% of the school staff attending a training session will show an increase in their knowledge of child abuse and neglect issues as shown through a pre- and post-test. Objective #3) Three months after training, 20% of the staff persons will report having identified a victim of child abuse.
- Make sure your objectives are measurable!! Use SMART objectives (there is plenty of information on SMART objectives on the internet if you're not familiar) – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, Time-specific.
- Showing sustainability – a foundation will usually look at the organization's operational budget and the total amount being requested to see if they are reasonable. They look at infrastructure and history of the organization to help determine if the scope of work for the program is practical for the organization. We look at audited financial statements and IRS form 990s.
- Lastly, be very careful if you include in your proposal that your organization is the **ONLY ONE** doing this kind of program in this kind of way. Over the past 10 years I have read this statement **MANY** times and it's only been true **once**. Sometimes organizations say this because they don't know that other organizations are out there doing the same thing, or they say it because they view other organizations doing this work as competitors. Don't write something unless you are absolutely sure it's true!