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“The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.”

- Edwin

Schlossberg

EDITOR'S NOTE

Summer is often a slow time for many nonprofit organizations — not only academic institutions but also social service agencies working closely with schools. I advise my clients to utilize such times for the analysis of past grant seeking efforts, perhaps by critiquing past proposals and asking other staff to suggest improvements. Schedule inter-agency meetings to create wish-lists of grant funds and brainstorm about partnerships and funding opportunities. This is also a good time to conduct interviews with staff, volunteers and clients to create a database of testimonials and stories for use in proposals. Good luck!

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CONVERSATIONS

Joseph J. Monti, Director of Foundation Relations
Rollins College, Winter Park FL

Q: What are some key experiences that have allowed you to attain success in grantseeking?

A: I started out in an entry-level, development writer position at a university, where I got exposed to almost all facets of the development profession, and particularly as it works in higher education. Being attached to the development research office and forging close working relationships with the finance office, as well as the challenge to crank out high-quality written works every day on deadline, were the key experiences in my initial job that enabled me to move onward and upward. More recently, the key experiences have been frequent interaction with the administrators, program directors, and faculty who run the programs that are funded by the grants I help them to win and steward. Also, knowing how programs and the institution works, and being readily conversant on those topics both - verbally and in writing - is a key ingredient to my ability to do my job. Finally, earning a master's degree in business administration helped me to better understand and articulate the technical financial aspects of most of the programs and projects for which I fundraise.

GAINING INTERNAL SUPPORT FOR GRANTSEEKING

You know that your project is a good one and that there are foundations out there willing to lend a hand financially – if only you could convince your Board of Directors to let you delve headfirst into the unknown worlds of grant seeking. It may sound crazy, but it isn't always a lack of interest that stalls the grant process – it's the organization's internal decision makers. Why the hesitation? For some it's simply a matter of not completely understanding what the grant process is all about; while for others it's fear that there will be too many strings attached to any grant money offered.

That leaves the hard work up to you: helping your department heads understand all of the benefits of applying for grant monies. Here are a few strategies to consider when dealing with resistant or less than enthusiastic participants:

- *Explain the pros and cons of grant seeking.* Certainly every grant isn't a good one and some proposals do require more work, energy and control than the grant is worth. Be honest with your decision makers about the types of grants you want to apply for and how they will benefit the organization.
- *Discuss the entire grant process.* Some Board Members may be hesitant about approving the go ahead for grant seeking simply because they have limited knowledge about the process. Explain step-by-step how the grant seeking process works – and be honest about your odds at landing a large (or even small) grant for your project.
- *Explain the benefits of obtaining a grant beyond the monetary aspect.* It isn't always just about the money when it comes to getting grants. Sometimes the ability to team up with a well-known foundation on a project can help give it the boost it needs with regard to publicity, legitimacy, fundraising, and more.
- *Provide a solid cost analysis.* What will it cost your organization in manpower and money to apply for specific grant? If it will cost you \$2,700 to hire a grant writer to submit a \$3,000 grant, you may want to reconsider your strategy. However, if that \$2,700 in expenses can help garner \$25,000 in grant monies, than your decision makers may be more apt to reconsider your request.
- *Tell them why the time is now.* Have you found a foundation eager to help out organizations such as your own? Has a new foundation put out a call for requests in your area? Or maybe you are starting a brand new project that screams "grant." Be sure to clearly outline all of your reasons for applying now, for those who'll give you the formal go ahead that you need to get started.

Finding foundations willing to fund your project isn't always easy. We all know that the process is long and difficult. That's why it is so essential to get everyone within the organization on board with your quest before you embark on this new journey. Otherwise you may be frustrated over a lack of support and help from not only key decision makers but also program staff and volunteers.

BOILER PLATE
CHECKLIST

Or

Documents You
Need to Have in
Place Before you
Start Writing

- Nonprofit determination letter form IRS
- Audited Financial Statements
- Year-to-date Financials
- Operating & Program Budgets
- Donor list
- Board of Directors list
- Annual Report
- Client Testimonials
- Program Summaries
- Fact Sheets
- Latest Numbers Served

WE RECOMMEND

Website: ZIPskinny

This is a comprehensive and interesting website with detailed information about Census Data based on zip codes. Ideal for needs assessments, it can be used to look up indicators, demographics and charts for any zip code, plus compare it to neighboring areas. www.zipskinny.com.

Report: General Operating Support, An Action Guide

Published by the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, this 2007 action guide provides insight into the minds and practices of foundations, including myths and realities of general operating support grants. Although aimed at funders, it can provide an understanding of the trends in grantmaking and offer valuable tips in how to align organizational needs with funder goals. The guide can be downloaded free of charge at www.geofunders.org/geopublications.aspx.

Book: Writing for a Good Cause by Barbato & Furlich

Here is an excellent book aimed at teaching nonprofit professionals how to write effectively. It includes tips and advice on crafting not only proposals, but also other pieces such as case statements, newsletters, thank you notes and website content. Chapters include “The Fundraising Writer’s Survival Kit”, “Second Drafts”. The book is available on Amazon and other online stores.

Upcoming Workshop Schedule

Houston, TX

- * September 12, 2008
- * December 5, 2008

Plymouth, IN

- * August 18-19, 2008

Caguas, Puerto Rico

- * August 21-22, 2008

Sacramento, CA

- * September 18-19, 2008

Visit www.us-government-grants.net/schedule.php for workshop details