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ESAA

Some hints on

HOW TO WRITE A PROPOSAL

Which has the chance of being funded

....if read by sympathetic, intelligent reviewers

....if directed at the priorities of the funding agencies

....if successful in competition with other outstanding proposals

....if monies are appropriated by Congress

....if monies are allocated by the Administration

....if sufficient funds are allocated to the local region

....if the local politics are in favor

....if you are skillfull
industrious
a good writer
a good salesman
a good public relations man

and lucky as hell

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Note - There are lots of guides and handbooks on "How To Write Projects." This material is not intended to duplicate any of those sources. I am trying to offer you some hints on little techniques, as well as overall processes, which have worked for me and have frequently resulted in funding.

Competition for project funds is increasing at an unbelievable rate. At the same time, funding agencies are developing improved degrees of sophistication in evaluating project applications and demanding quality and accountability. This is desirable to assure maximum effectiveness from programs, but places tremendous demands on applicants, perhaps to the point where proposal development is a profession of its own.

The material below takes you step-by-step through the process I follow in developing a proposal. It's a brief summary; details would fill a book, which I would really like to write.....if I could get a grant to pay for it!

Cheers,

A basic philosophy:

Seems there are two ways to approach trying to get a grant:

(1) You know some funding source is giving grants, so let's write a proposal to get some money out of them, which will help our community, kids, or something.

(2) We have identified some problems in our community, very clearly, very specifically, and preferably with statistical, demographic data. Let's find a source of money to fund the program we have developed to solve these problems.

Number (1) above is typical....unfortunately. It often results in nebulous programs which really don't focus on top-priority problems, consequently resulting in minimal effectiveness.

PLEASE, start with a deep commitment that you want to solve some top-priority problems in your sphere of influence. Start focusing in on problems, not yet solutions, nor funding, nor projection....just identify a problem YOU CAN DEAL WITH, very clearly.

Problem Identification:

"YOU" means the people involved in the problem. Nobody in an office, in a school, as P.T.A. president...or whatever can really specify the problems. I firmly believe only those who are experiencing the problem can identify it. Go to the people in their homes....they'll specify problems.

If you can, end up with the problem stated behaviorally. That's a tough task; but it'll make everything you develop later so much easier. In other words, come up with a problem statement something like these:

"Forty percent of young people between the ages of fifteen and seventeen drop out of school in our target area."

or

"Sixty-five percent of children between the ages of twelve and seventeen use heavy narcotics to a degree where it interferes with their achievement and normal functioning."

or

"Fifteen percent of the families in our target area are in such a state of poverty that their children exhibit symptoms of malnutrition, which seriously debilitates their functioning."

You see? You end up with problem statements on which you can focus, for which you can design very specific programs, which makes it possible for you to HONESTLY evaluate your effectiveness and results....and which has potential for funding.

Objectives:

It's pretty easy to come up with a statement of objectives now: objectives which are measurable, realistic, and directed toward the need, or problem. Typically, project writers will come up with something like: "We will counsel with two-hundred and fifty drop-outs during the year and motivate them to either return to school or enter a training program."

What have you got?

Nothing....in terms of what changes will take place; changes which will reduce the problem.

BUT, if you state: "At the end of the funding period, sixty percent of the two-hundred and fifty drop-outs with whom our agency will work during the year will be in a vocational training program or will be re-enrolled in the public school."

Then you have an objective.

Do you have the guts to write such an objective? It will force you to focus on problems, to produce results, to be accountable....to deliver. Cause in the end, somebody is going to look at your results and determine if you've done what you promised when they gave you the money. That's to be your evaluation. BUT, if you write such an objective and pursue it, and achieve it, you'll be one of the very few programs that's successful.

Activities:

By now you probably have some idea of what you are going to do to meet your objective and solve the problem. Brainstorm with a lot of people from the community, as well as experts, to arrive at an INNOVATIVE solution. The more unique and promising your plan, the more likely it'll be funded. That's your baby, and not much more need to be said about it now....except: do a little research and find out what others around the country are doing about the same problem. You might get some ideas, and you also won't duplicate, unless desirable.

Evaluation:

You should now have a picture in your mind of what you are going to do, and how you are going to do it. If you have stated your objectives clearly, the evaluation is very easy. Those two must always tie together: Objectives and Evaluation. In other words, at the end of the period, let's find out what percentage of those youngsters we counseled are really in a training program or back to school. If this percentage is close to your objective, "You're doing your thing."

See what you have now?

A Statement of Problem:	What's wrong with our clients?
An Objective (or several):	What will our clients be like when we finish helping them?
Activities:	How will we get them there?
Evaluation:	What are our clients like now that we've worked with them.

There's your project.

Now let's look for funds!

Abstract and First Contact:

All the material above can be drawn together into a very concise, definitive abstract of two single-space pages. Identify each section as indicated above. Don't talk budget or money at this point, you might scare off some funding sources.

Make lots of copies of your abstract neatly mimeographed.

Send it to every funding source who might, in some way or another, be interested in your type of problem or program.

Send it to some specific person. It'll create more of an obligation to respond....and will put you into communication with a body out there, not just an institution.

And send it with a cover-letter. That letter should be your main sales pitch. Here you can talk briefly about the severe problems in your area, how innovative your program is, how the community is behind you, etc., etc. Close the letter by offering more details on your proposal as soon as you hear from them.

As a result, you'll probably

(1) Get no answer from some.

(2) Get request for more information.

(3) Get a set of detailed guidelines.

(4) Get a friendly but firm letter that you have a very promising program, but they can't fund it.

Give up on (4); and try another letter to (1); send details to (2); and get into direct communication with (3).

Developing the proposal:

We're at a point where it becomes most difficult to give advice, because each funding source uses different methods, guidelines, demands different data, etc. I obtained one fairly substantial grant with a four page letter, another one with a hundred-and-fifty page proposal.

But generally:

(1) Almost every funding agency uses guidelines. Study these until you know them totally.

(2) Almost every agency will talk to you before you submit your proposal. After you know the guidelines, meet with someone from that agency and find out what they really want in the proposal.

(3) Almost every agency has a "typical" amount they will fund. Find this out. If you ask for one hundred thousand dollars from an agency which typically grants twenty thousand, you've lost them.

(4) Almost every agency has a certain format, style, etc. of proposals which appeals to them. Try and get some copies of projects which were funded, and some which were not; and try to find the difference. Find out what the agency likes.

Writing is a basic skill. Proposal writing is a skill which can be learned, provided the person is a pretty good writer to start out with. Here's what I've found effective:

(1) Stick strictly to the guidelines. Answer the requested material as clearly and precisely as you can.

(2) Label each section so that it is very obvious what part of the guidelines you are following.

(3) Use very simple, descriptive, narrative language. Avoid fancy terminology, phony professional double-talk. Describe in easy-to-understand words just what you want to do, within the framework of the guidelines.

(4) Point out repeatedly how innovative your program is, how it focuses on the priority of problems which are the concern of the funding agency, and how deeply the community was involved in planning.

However, writing the narrative of a proposal is only a small part of the whole process. Here's what I suggest as a <u>methodical approach to project development</u>:

(1) Start with a <u>worksheet</u>, on which you list every item to be part of the final product, such as:

Cover
Title Page
Table of Contents
Narrative
Letters of Support
Budget, etc.
ending up with the back cover

Provide spaces for checking off when each item has been prepared, when it has been produced, when it is in final form, and when it is included in the document.

(2) You're usually faced with a deadline for submission. Plan your schedule to finish at least a week in advance to allow for last minute emergencies, mailing time, etc.

(3) Allow for adequate production time, printing, obtaining signitures, and all those little details. You can really get hung up on trying to get someone to sign the application in the last minute, or getting a cover back from the printer, etc....little things which you never even thought about.

A fantastic amount of staff time is demanded just to put the thing together; particularly if you have about a hundred copies of a hundred-and-fifty page proposal to assemble and bind. This may seem very mundane, but it's a major task to consider.

(4) After the thing is put together, go through every single copy which is mailed to the funding agency. You'll be amazed how many pages you'll discover left out, or misplaced, or perhaps upside down.

(5) Be sure you number your pages, and have a table of content. I know of one proposal which was turned down because the pages weren't numbered.

Generally, here are a couple more hints which may help a bit:

(1) Have a very catchy name, which will remain in people's minds. Nobody remembers a title like: "A Program to Reduce Drop-Outs in High Schools in Cucamonga." But call something Project MOVE (More Opportunities Via Education)....and it'll be remembered. Good acronyms are great.

(2) Make your final product look attractive. Have an appealing cover, make it well typed and easy to read, so the reviewer will enjoy going through it. Unconsciously, he'll be favorably inclined.

(3) Obtain meaningful letters of support from important people and include them in your proposal. Letters from powerful organizations, Congressmen, and other persons of stature may carry some weight.

(4) If you have time and if they are willing, try to have someone from the funding agency go over a rough draft. They may be willing to critique it for you and help you provide a final copy which will be much enhanced for funding potential.

(5) If you really want to impress them, try to throw in a few flow-charts here and there; hint at the use of automated data processing (Computers) in your evaluation; and give evidence of your sophisticated familiarity with systems approaches. Many funding agencies really dig that stuff....for whatever it's worth.

<u>The BUDGET</u> can be a very tricky item. If you haven't developed any before, get help from a business manager, or some such expert. Here's what to keep in mind:

(1) If you ask for considerably too much money, and receive it, you may have too large an ending balance after the first funding period, and they'll give you less the following period.

(2) If you don't ask for enough, you'll run short during the year.

(3) Keep in mind that most submitted budgets are cut to varying degrees by the funding agency. So, have some items in your budget which you are prepared to eliminate or reduce. This can best be done through consultants' fees, furniture, and perhaps supplies. You can always do without a consultant, buy second-hand office furniture, and use a little less paper.

(4) There are expenses which creep up and are often not included in the budget, such as postage, utilities, fringe benefits, anticipated pay-increases, printing cost, etc. Search your mind carefully for all possible expenses which may occur, and include them in that budget.

(5) Be able to justify each item in the budget in terms of your program. Be prepared to show how you're going to keep "X" number of secretaries busy, how you're going to fill "Y" number of file-cabinets with papers, and why you (the director) need to take five trips to Las Vegas during the year.

(6) Consider COST EFFECTIVENESS when you come up with your total. In other words, will the total amount you are requesting be justified in terms of the clients you plan to serve. If you're going to stop one hundred youngsters from using narcotics, and you have a budget of $100,000; that means your cost per client is $1,000. I think there are less expensive programs which are doing the same thing....or at least trying. Thus, divide your total budget by the number of persons you hope to change, and see if your cost-per-client looks realistic.

Anyway, you can probably see why a realistic budget can only be developed after the program is pretty well laid out; otherwise it can only be guess work.

Well, friend, that's what I have to communicate to you about program development. It's really kind of a skill which grows with experience, the same as any other profession. Applying some of the things - or hopefully, all of them - that are mentioned above, should get you onto the right track. Please remember that there are so very many variables beyond your control, to some of which I alluded on the front cover, that very often you may write a perfect proposal....and it still doesn't get funded. That, you'll have to learn to live with in this game.

I'd like to leave you with where we started: PLEASE don't just go hunting for funds. The needs in our society which you and I are trying to deal with are so overwhelming, and the funds are so very limited, and the commitment for improvement is so very rare, that every penny we obtain through a grant must be used to improve the lot of those we seek to help and serve.

Good Luck,