Finding Funding: Writing a Grant Proposal for Commercial/Industrial Industries

For those who aren't well-versed in grant funding development, grant writing can be a challenge. Following several key steps for any grant development venture is crucial for putting an organization in a position to receive funding.

Find the Right Grant

It can be overwhelming when looking at a list of the dozens of request for proposals (RFPs) from various grant sponsors. If an existing project is in need of grant funding, breaking the project down into its fundamental elements — key players, funding need, impact, theme, topic and task — helps to find which part can connect to a specific RFP.

It is also good practice to look for stacking match funding to support the primary grant application. Find out what is available at the city, county and regional level, both public (i.e., municipalities, regulatory agencies) and private (i.e., university, foundations). There is less competition for these sources, which increases the chances of receiving small match funding amounts.

Understand the Grant Scope

With page counts for some RFPs reaching into triple digits, it can be easy to overlook subtle but critical requirements for eligibility. The broad terms of the grant may make it seem ideal, but the subtle details in the fine print may make the grant challenging to execute or disqualify your application.

A team of RFP reviewers can verify such that eligibility to apply before proposal writing starts. An experienced set of eyes can determine if the scope is a good fit for the client.

If there are questions regarding the application process, professional grant writers or proposal developers — who are most familiar with the needs of both the RFP and the client's needs — can contact the grant administrators or coordinators directly. Testing ideas and asking for clarity with grant program officers without understanding the project scope and funding intent can lead to more confusion with the RFP document.

Write to the Scoring Criteria Matrix

Writing to the scoring matrix may seem obvious but following the directions in the RFP is often tedious and convoluted. There are always formatting guidelines and templates outlined by the grant sponsor. There's no sense worth losing points during the review process due to an incorrect font, improper margin spacing or other formatting issues.

When a narrative is built, the key proposal components are used to persuade reviewers of project significance and

feasibility. It is important to parse the grant program to understand what the sponsor wants accomplished with the organization's money. Significant effort is undertaken to convey to the grant sponsor that funding the project will have a good chance of achieving the organization's goals. Address the sponsor's problem with a set of activities that will accomplish specific goals and objectives.

Writing style does matter in grant proposals. A grant proposal should be written concisely and speak directly to what the project is focused on. Fewer words with greater clarity will improve a grant proposal score. Unfocused and loquacious writing will hinder and annoy those reviewing the proposal. Strive to not make the reviewers work harder than they must by being clear on the aspect of the intended high impact of the proposed project. Even the most well-written proposals will not win money if the project itself revolves around a weak idea.

Submit the Grant Early

Submitting a grant before its deadline is immensely wise. Host servers for the submission webpage are inundated with last-minute submittals causing freezing webpage crashes. Even if a client is trying to submit a proposal five minutes before the deadline, there is zero tolerance for late submissions regardless of technical issues. To check that a client's submissions are received, plan to submit at least one week in advance so that if there are any issues with submission, the grant host can have time to respond to inquiries and make accommodations.

Gather the Necessary Resources

For most proposals, a team is needed to execute the objectives when the notice to proceed is awarded. The assembled team's project history and overall experience

are significant factors in the scoring metric. Conveying the credibility of the resources available is critical in building confidence by the reviewer.

Including sufficient preliminary data establishes feasibility for a proposal. Reviewers will question the ability of the presented team unless competence is demonstrated. A compelling case would be needed to be built to fund the project with grant money during the grant narrative writing process. The details to support those ideas will help build that compelling case.

The ability to craft a grant that moves effortlessly between highly technical ideas and elegant language structure is the height of quality grant writing. Obtaining grant funding is challenging. The best-written proposal will not win money for a weak idea, but many good ideas are not funded because of poor writing.

With constraints such as time, other ongoing business development and existing projects, do everything possible to maximize odds of success. This can include working with a company that has the capabilities to write the proposal and also take the project to success.

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