

Agencies Highlight Best Practices

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Of all the resources grant professionals can draw upon to improve their funding applications, one very important one can be easy to overlook: the grant-making agencies themselves.

Though individual federal agencies vary in the types of advice they offer to prospective applicants, most make a concerted effort to provide grantseekers with best practices and effective strategies to ensure their applications adhere to the agency's parameters and meet with favorable comments from reviewers. Some even offer examples of successful applications from previous funding rounds to illustrate what types of proposals are likely to win funding in future competitions.

While most agencies' application guidance includes generic advice that applies to just about every federal grant program, many of them also provide more in-depth, agency-specific tips. *Local/State Funding Report* examined grant-writing guidance and resources from a wide range of federal agencies and singled out some of the most helpful advice.

ETA: Organization is Key

Anyone who has been through the application development process can appreciate just how complex and detail-intensive putting together a proposal can be. To keep everyone involved in writing the proposal on the same page, the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration strongly suggests that grantseekers begin by developing an outline that responds to each of the application's required elements and organizes information about the project in response to those requirements. The outline

approach, says ETA, will allow different members of the development team to work on their assigned sections of the application at different times while still maintaining a common vision for the final proposal.

The Department of Health and Human Services also stresses the importance of a strong organizational scheme. Many applications for HHS funding are rejected because, according to the department, “reviewers cannot follow the thought process of the applicant or because parts of the application do not fit together.”

Concentrate on Collaboration

ETA also advises its applicants to emphasize the importance of any collaborative partnerships or nonfederal support that will contribute to their projects. “Simply mentioning that organization A intends to partner with organization B is not enough,” the agency warns. Grant writers should instead incorporate the impact of that partnership throughout the proposal, and explain exactly how the primary grantee will communicate and collaborate with its partner organizations.

Budgeting: Be Specific

When developing the budget for the proposed project, the Environmental Protection Agency reminds its applicants to think of the budget as an estimate, rather than an inflexible commitment of how grant dollars will be spent. However, that estimate should still be precise. “Rounding to [the] nearest thousand dollars does not inspire confidence.

It also suggests you have not done much work preparing the budget,” EPA warns.

Allocations for specific project expenses can always be modified later through a formal request to the agency, but those allocations should still reflect the applicant’s best

estimate of expenses for equipment, materials and personnel, and should incorporate anticipated adjustments, such as cost of living adjustments for salaries.

Learn from the Success of Previous Grantees

Finally, grantor agencies often provide prospective applicants with actual applications that received funding in previous years. Obtaining an old application may require a phone call to the program officer who actually administers that particular grant program, but some agencies post sample applications on their Web sites as a resource for all applicants. For instance, the Institute of Museum and Library Services is particularly forthcoming in publishing model applications; visitors to the IMLS site will find successful proposals for 12 different grant programs, including several with multiple application options. Of course, emulating a winning proposal is no guarantee of future success, but sample applications can be extremely helpful in suggesting effective methods of organization and presentation when making the funding case for your proposed project.