

Understanding the Human Side of Grantseeking

This article originally appeared in the Nov. 9, 2009, issue of Thompson Publishing

Group's Local/State Funding Report. For more information, go to: www.thompson.com.

In recent weeks, *L/SFR* has looked at a series of do's and don'ts for those getting ready to apply for federal grants. Following these practical tips can go a long way toward avoiding some of the mistakes federal reviewers cite most frequently as reasons for rejecting a funding request. However, there is an additional, less tangible consideration that potential grantseekers must also take into account: human nature.

No matter how well thought-out your proposal may be, the ultimate decision on whether to fund your project will be made by an individual, or group of individuals. And each proposal reviewer will approach your application with his or her own unique set of beliefs and biases.

So, before writing your proposal, consider these potential hazards:

- People tend to believe what they want to believe. If the proposal reviewer rejects what you have written as unbelievable, too difficult to grasp or contrary to what he or she already believes, your proposal has failed.
- Logic cannot overcome bias. Beginning sentences with words or phrases such as "Clearly" or "It is obvious that ..." is unlikely to overcome someone's preexisting bias. In fact, such words or phrases may be counterproductive by calling attention to a weak argument.
- The validity of any argument depends upon the acceptance of the stated premises. Your reviewer may reject your premises because he or she knows them to be false or is biased against them. Since you cannot compel the reviewer to accept your premises, you

must look for sympathetic funding sources and attempt to persuade through a combination of logic, clarity of message, accuracy and sound organization.

To help overcome these human obstacles, try to anticipate possible obstacles and get around them by:

- understanding the possible biases the reviewers could bring to the evaluation process;
- imagining your reviewer's likely objectives and wants, both conscious and unconscious;
- making sure the facts and statistics you present in your proposal are beyond doubt;
- avoiding emotion-laden words that could trigger reviewer biases;
- keeping the reviewer's priorities in mind and appeal to them often; and
- scrutinizing your arguments to make sure they are logically sound.