Grant Development Training Series - Proposal Development

While each grant is unique and requirements will vary from application to application, there are often common elements across grant proposals. The purpose of this session is to become familiar with the basic components of a grant application.

Grant Formats

Request for Proposals (RFP) / Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) / Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) - You might hear a grant opportunity referred to as an RFP, NOFO, or FOA. These terms simply mean that the funder has released a call for projects. This is common with federal and state funding sources that provide grants to address specific needs and priorities. The RFP, NOFO, or FOA refer to the set of guidelines that dictate what content needs to be in your application as well as other requirements/considerations for the applicant. These types of grant opportunities will have specific due dates.

Funder-Provided Applications / "Fill in the Blank" Forms - Rather than release guidelines explaining how an applicant should construct a grant proposal, funders may opt to provide a specific form or application document. These forms will have specific questions that an applicant must answer, often with limited character counts.

No Format Provided - If you run into a scenario where a funder does not provide any guidance on what content they would like to see in a grant application, consider using the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) [Common Grant Application Template](). This template is intended to be utilized by multiple foundations, minimizing the burden on nonprofit partners to complete numerous, divergent applications looking to obtain grants from multiple funders. Many Michigan-based foundations now use this format.

Tips - When it comes to the format of the application, the funder is in the driver's seat. Be sure to read through any and all information provided by the funder and follow their instructions. If you still have questions, reach out to the funder to confirm.

Common Grant Components

Sample Grants / Documents - The following components are commonly required in grant applications. Link to [Sample Documents]().

Letter of Inquiry - A Letter of Inquiry is not always required. If requested by the funder, the LOI provides an opportunity to introduce your project and to make sure it meets the funder's priorities. If successful, the funder will invite the applicant to submit a full proposal.

Elements to include in an LOI, unless otherwise noted:
- Introduction to the Organization
- Brief Description of Need for the Project
- Project Description / Solution to Identified Need
- Alignment to the Funder's Goals / Priorities
- Summary

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Common Grant Components (Cont.)

Abstract/Summary - Think of the abstract as an opportunity to grab the reviewers attention right away. This section should serve as a standalone summary of the initiative.

- Often used by the funder for public listings of awarded grants
- Follow the three "C's" - Clear, Concise, & Compelling
- Captures key project elements
- Similar Content as an LOI
    - Introduce the problem or issue that the project aims to address
    - Objectives: Clearly state the specific objectives and goals of the project.
    - Strategy: Briefly describe the strategies that will be used to achieve the project objectives.

Statement of Need - The Statement of Need is the "why" behind your proposal. In this section, make sure to make a compelling argument of why your proposal is needed.

- Do's
    - Use data to support your need statements
    - Know your audience - set a tone that is appropriate for the funder
    - Be specific to YOUR community/challenges
- Don't:
    - Don't describe only the need for funding, focus on the need for change/impact instead.
    - Don't exaggerate or mislead - Present the need accurately and cite sources when applicable.

Organizational Capacity - In this section, funders want to know why they should invest in your organization to address the identified need. This is your chance to showcase your experience/expertise.

- Key Talking Points:
    - Tell the funder why your organization is the right group to lead the proposed initiative.
    - Showcase your past experience similar successes.
    - Describe key staff/volunteer qualifications.
    - Include information about past grant management and fiscal controls.
    - Provide supporting documentation if allowed (org charts, resume, etc.)

Program Design/Implementation Plan - Now tell the funder how you will address the problem using your organizational resources.

- Do's
    - Describe how you will meet the needs identified.
    - Be specific - Define your program/activities.
    - Include descriptions of partnerships.
    - Make connections to community priorities/plans.
    - Use timelines and specific milestones in your plan.
- Don't
    - Don't forget about the priorities of the funder! Show how the initiative is aligned to their mission or scoring rubric.
    - Don't assume reviewers know anything about your organization or initiative. Avoid jargon.

Common Grant Components (Cont.)

Outcomes/Evaluation - In this section, define the change that will happen as a result of your proposal. What difference will it make?
- Do's
  - Use SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant & Timebound)
  - Use indicators/data that you have the ability to collect - you will be required to report on your goals
  - Use both short-term and long-term outcomes.
- Don't:
  - Don't forget about the needs/objectives identified in the other sections of your grant. Make sure the outcomes in the evaluation plan are consistent with the activities proposed in the grant.

Budget Tips -
- Use the funder provided format, if applicable
- Clearly delineate what the grant funds will cover vs. other funding sources
- Use a budget narrative to explain how costs were calculated.
- Be consistent - Don't include a major expense that was not referenced in your application.
- Double check your math.
- Make sure any estimates are realistic. In most cased, organizations are responsible for any overages.

Sustainability - Funders want to know how their investment will yield long-term success rather than end once the grant period is finished.
- Tips
  - Explain how you will continue the initiative beyond the grant period
  - Funders like to be the catalyst for an initiative but don't want to see their investments "fizzle out"
  - Demonstrate your track record of fundraising using diverse funding streams.
  - Detail the need for ongoing funds, if applicable.

Grant Writing Skills

- Pay close attention to the details. Be sure to study the grant guidelines to develop an effective application. Follow the rules and be clear and concise.
- Don't rely on just your own proof-reading and editing skills, Engage your Board members or committee volunteers.
- Don't procrastinate! Grant writing should be a collaborative process and will often require documents/participation from others. By waiting until the last minute to develop an application, you run the risk of missing important requirements.
- Create a narrative that is both informative and that makes the potential funder feel the importance of the project or program at hand.