

This article highlights the importance of advance planning in order to increase the chances of being awarded grants.

January 1, 2004 - by Sheila Fernley and Nickie Weaver

Planning Proposals that Get Funded

You wouldn't go on a vacation without a plan, so why would you apply for a grant without plan?

The first mistake that many novice and experienced grant writers make is that they don't develop a plan before jumping into the proposal writing stage.

Planning takes time, but organizations can begin by developing a portfolio of information that can be used when writing a number of different grant proposals. This is important, because often times grant deadlines are short and don't afford the applicants much planning time.

Give Yourself Time to Plan

Much planning for a grant proposal must take place long before a word goes on paper. Planning for the initial \$250,000 Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board grant, under which Irving.Net was established, began seven years before the successful proposal was awarded. While every proposal doesn't require seven years of planning, a grant writer does need to plan and begin building a portfolio of data, demographics and research. Grant writers also should begin establishing partnerships and collaborations, as well as clarifying and refining their concept. Irving.Net is an Irving ISD project; however, this community network project was established through an interlocal agreement between the city of Irving, Irving ISD, the Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce and North Lake College. This partnership expanded the project's resources, provided valuable expertise and created project credibility.

Creating an Original Concept

In particular, federal agencies and foundations fund projects that are original in concept. Once you have developed a vision or a concept for a proposal, use the Internet to research whether a similar concept has been previously funded by the granting agency or organization. Summaries of currently funded projects are usually posted by the funding source. Check within your organization, as well as with other local and state agencies and private organizations to determine if a similar project exists. If duplication exists, study the projects carefully so that your proposal will highlight differences and improvements.

Selling Your Concept

It's also important to remember that community partnerships are essential, but it is difficult to gain a commitment of support unless a clear and compelling concept is defined. The marketing field uses the term "elevator pitch" for a brief verbal description of a company or product that can be shared with someone in the short time it takes to move from floor to floor on an elevator. An elevator pitch must be compelling enough to capture someone's interest and intrigue them to learn more.

Letters of Endorsement

Proper letters of endorsement and support are an essential part of most funded proposals as well. These letters must come from credible sources and should include details of support and related value (i.e., facilities, services, cash contributions). Remember that acquiring letters of endorsement takes time, and some agencies require negotiations before a letter of endorsement or affiliation agreement is signed.

“Show Me the Money”

As a part of the planning process, identify all the funding sources that offer grant awards to projects like yours. Make a spreadsheet of these resources, including a column for each deadline date, for each date you submitted an application, contact information, Web site, areas of support, types of organizations that receive funding, etc. Do not list funding sources that exclude your agency or organization due to various criteria like geographic region. Add to this list as you uncover additional sources of funding, and remember that a strong sustainable project may have multiple sources of funding that address different parts of the project.

Source: Tips on Getting Your Technology Projects Funded; T.H.E. Journal, January 1, 2004; Sheila Fernley and Nickie Weaver