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Grant Writing: Tips for Success

Zina McGee

A strong, organized grant application usually reflects organized team members who are prepared to implement the project. An organized team will assist in the development of a clear and concise application. In many cases, an outline will serve as a checklist for not only the writer but also the project team.

When preparing an outline for a grant, remember no detail is too small, include everything that you want to highlight in the application. Maybe the writer wants to include information about a previous program and chooses to place it in a section about support. If this information is in an outline that is shared with the project team, someone will be able to affirm that this is the appropriate location for this information or the team may conclude that the information would be more appropriate in a section about past successful programs. An outline is an excellent communication tool for the whole project team.

While some grant writers may choose to prepare the complete application before sharing it, it is often best to create an outline to share with the project team first. The entire team should be encouraged to review the outline and provide comments and suggestions for improvement. It is much easier to reorganize an outline three weeks before the application is due than to rewrite ten pages two days before the deadline. Grant writers need to manage the process of collecting input and making clear writing assignments in a manner that will avoid having to make last minute changes. Those last minute changes can lead to an oversight of the obvious like forgetting to include a key resume or not signing the application page.

An application may seem to be complete but if there are gaps in the description of the project, reviewers may think that the project design has not been well thought out. The gap in information may also result in a lack of clarity. A writer who writes with passion and commitment can become exuberant about the application and may veer from an outline. When this happens, there can be good results and sometimes bad results too. One of the good results is that the language can be very compelling and engaging. A bad result can be that a key element in the application is overlooked and therefore not addressed. The best way to avoid this situation is to carefully follow a pre agreed upon detailed outline.

If the outline has been written in sufficient detail, it will easily translate into

clear, crisp and concise sentences. When the entire proposal is written in this way, the reader will be as engaged and excited about the application as the applicant. Another way to ensure clarity is to involve other readers who are NOT familiar with the project but do have some familiarity with its goals. Make sure that the readers do not assume anything. The readers should be instructed to be critical and forthcoming regarding any concerns. They should also be instructed to review the application for accuracy. Most panel members reviewing the application at the federal level can detect exaggerated promises since they are knowledgeable about the program and may have worked in local organizations as well.

Here is a suggested method of working with an outline:

- 1) Create a detailed outline in accordance with the agency.
- 2) Share the outline with the project team and with potential supporters.
- 3) Consider feedback, additions and deletions.
- 4) Share the outline again.

While there are many books available discussing how to obtain grant funding, the following tips may be helpful.

GENERAL TIPS TO ENHANCE A GRANT APPLICATION

- Read the guidelines carefully.
- Organize your application according to the agency's need.
- Pay attention to the rating criteria before you begin writing.
- Explain things - don't DECLARE them.
- Don't make assumptions of your reviewers.
- Avoid jargon and A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.S.
- Don't simply reiterate buzzwords.
- Be innovative...new audiences, new techniques, etc.
- Be passionate.
- Be realistic.
- Be specific. "I would like this much in order to do this."
- Show the funding organization the return on its investment.
- Check grammar, spelling, and typos.
- Ask someone else to review it.
- Solicit partners.
- If the funding organization says "no," ask why.
- Volunteer to be an evaluator.

Announcements

During the Spring 2008 semester, the CTE Associates will be available to conduct school-wide workshops on assessment, pedagogy, technology, research and advisement. Please contact us if you would like to schedule a workshop in any of these areas. We would be happy to accommodate you.