Tips for Writing and Submitting Proposals for Federal Grants

California Governor's Office of Planning and Research

Introduction

- The following information includes a list of key recommendations that should be considered for planning and writing a grant proposal.

- The contents within this presentation originate from the following sources:
  - United States Health Resources and Services Administration (https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/grants/apply/writestrong/grantwritingtips.pdf)
  - California Department of Food and Agriculture (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/2018SCBGP_CP_PPT4__GrantWriting.pdf)

The Top Ten To-Do's of Grant Writing/Proposal Submission

1. Read the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), or Request for Proposals (RFP), or Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) carefully.

2. Have a conversation with your colleagues. Does your organization have the capacity to accomplish what is described in the FOA? Can you really do what is being asked?

3. Evaluate whether this is worth your effort. Do not ask if you need the funding. Ask if you are ready and able to commit to the potential grant project.

4. Look at your fiscal house. Do you have the fiscal infrastructure to meet the financial reporting requirements and related tasks?

5. Discuss with your Board and your team about how to prepare a quality proposal, and discuss how you would implement that proposal and gauge the quality of your work.

The Top Ten To-Do's of Grant Writing/Proposal Submission

6. Assess the specifics of the FOA and how they relate to the awarding agency's overall mission and goals.

7. Ask the awarding agency questions. Every FOA should include contact information for program (content of the proposal) and grants management (process, budget and reporting) questions.

8. If available, participate in technical assistance calls and webinars, which might be listed in the FOA.

9. When you have completed your proposal, review it thoroughly. Have you provided the required information? Have you adhered to every requirement, such as page limits and file types?

10. Read the proposal again. You could even ask a colleague outside your organization to give it a critical review.

Hiring a Grant Writer

- Grant writers can be a real asset.
  - They understand how to write a powerful proposal
- If you hire a grant writer, remember that you are in control.
- Be sure to review the proposal thoroughly.
- Make sure that you have the people, systems and plan in place to execute the project.

Constructing a Proposal without Hiring a Grant Writer

- Proposals written in-house can also be successful because grant writers:
  - may not know enough information about your organization to effectively tell your story, and
  - may be expensive (also, the cost may not be covered by the grant, should you receive an award).

Constructing a Proposal without Hiring a Grant Writer

- Although it is important to consider that developing proposals in-house can also be costly, homegrown grant writers know the organization and can call on colleagues to:
  - Take a team approach to the effort;
  - Involve diverse areas of expertise;
  - Matches skill sets with tasks;
  - Incorporate a system of checks and balances into the process; and,
  - Provide a level of accountability.

Proposal Sections

- Many applications are rated and scored according to the following important sections:
  - Need or Problem Identification
  - Goals and Objectives
  - Response and Impact
  - Evaluation Plan
  - Resources and Capabilities
  - Budget

Need or Problem Identification

- The problem identification is the need that the FOA is intended to fill, not the need of your organization for funding.

- Emphasize the Public Benefit
  - Bad Example: "This grant would allow our organization to expand our training program and become the leading provider of training for socially disadvantaged farmers in Stanislaus County."
  - Good Example: "This grant would enable our organization to triple the number of socially disadvantaged farmers served by our training program, thus countering the current deficit of professionally trained farmers in Stanislaus County."

Need or Problem Identification

- Speak directly to the requested service and use data to describe the external problem that your organization will solve.

- Don't tailor your organization to the proposal just for assistance. You're submitting a proposal because you are familiar with the work in question.

- Demonstrate through your proposal that you understand the task at hand, and describe your track record for addressing such tasks in the past in order to establish a clear link between your organization and the problem identified.

Need or Problem Identification (Example)

"A 2016 survey conducted by the Department of Health found that fruit and vegetable consumption among adolescents between 12 and 18 years in Sacramento County was 2.3 cups per day, far below the recommended 3.5 to 6.5 cups...

However, teens who were taught how to cook healthy food reported eating 1.4 servings more than peers who had not been taught...

For the past 10 years, our district has increased interest in and consumption of fruits and vegetables among students in Sacramento County through school gardens and nutrition education...

This project proposes to increase consumption levels by implementing cooking classes for students that pair lesson plans about the benefits of healthy eating with cooking demonstrations and hands-on preparation of fruits and vegetables."

Goals and Objectives

- Clearly defined Goals and Objectives can greatly aid in the development of a proposal.

- The Goals and Objectives (of the organization and the proposal) should be widely known by any party involved in proposal submission, or project implementation/performance.

- Goals are Intangible, while Objectives are Tangible.

- Outline the tasks and activities that should be carried out to achieve specific Objectives

- Describe the Objectives that should be met in order to reach the overall Goals.

Use Measurable Outcomes

- Weak Example: "Provide cooking classes to teens between the ages of 14 and 18 one day a week."

- Strong Example: "250 teens between the ages of 14 and 18 will increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables by 1 serving per day by the end of the 2019 academic year as measured by pre- and post-program surveys."

Response and Impact

- Provide detailed information on how your proposal will affect the targeted population or study area.
  - Tell the reviewer what you will do
  - Identify who will complete each task
  - Include a timeframe for each activity
- Think like a Reviewer. Reviewers rate and score many applications—make your proposal stand out and explain why you believe your approach is valid.
- Provide statistics when possible.
- Do not pad or over-emphasize your expectations. Speak truthfully and stick to the facts.
- Describe the value and need for your proposed project.

Evaluation Plan

- Describe your proposed method of evaluation. How will you measure success?

- Measurable Outcome Example: "250 teens between the ages of 14 and 18 will increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables by 1 serving per day as measured by pre- and post-program surveys."

- Evaluation Method Example: "Students will be surveyed at the beginning and end of the program to determine servings of fruits and vegetables consumed daily."

Resources and Capabilities

- What you as an applicant bring to the table
- The length and breadth of your experience
- Staffing
- Knowledge base
- Fiscal viability
- Ability to match funds, if required

Budget

- Match the budget with the goals and objectives.

- Provide narratives to justify the proposed cost amounts.

- Use accurate mathematical calculations.

- Remember that a budget is a plan.

- Review the cost effectiveness of the project and the overall budget.

- Make sure that cost line items are grouped within the appropriate cost categories.

Budget

- If matching funds or cost sharing is required, the FOA will state that. Be sure to include any relevant budget information where and when appropriate.

- Only include costs that are significant to the proposed project.

- Pay attention to the allowability and reasonability of costs per 2 CFR 200 (Cost Principles)

  - For-profit organizations are subject to 48 CFR Subpart 31.2.

- Work with your fiscal staff.

- Review the proposal for any cost or budgetary limitations, such as indirect costs.

Before Submission

- Check spelling.
- Check calculations.
- Check due dates.
- Check the submission package and make sure that:
  - All required forms and necessary attachments are included
  - All documents are in the order described in the FOA
  - Any page number and font size requirements are followed
- Review the scoring criteria of each section and gauge how your proposal measures up.

Submission

- Don't wait until the last minute and avoid late submissions.

- Mark your calendar. An estimated date of award should be included in the FOA regarding when you will hear from the awarding agency to confirm whether or not your proposal is selected to receive funding.