



Assisting non-profits to fund their dreams

Ten Keys to Winning Grant Dollars

Grant Pathways' staff has over 25 years of experience writing grant proposals for all types and sizes of non-profits. Our clients have included non-profits who are just getting started all the way to multi-million dollar agencies. Our clients have provided a multitude of very valuable services that have made significant improvements in their communities. Their services ranged from feeding the hungry, providing after-school programming, building low-income housing, providing transitional housing and a whole host of other services that are too numerous to mention here! As we have worked with these agencies, we have identified numerous keys to success in the grant seeking process. We have identified ten of the most important below.

1. Define your program and its SMART outcomes.

Funders want to know what your program will provide and what the measurable impact of their gift will be. SMART outcomes are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-measured.

2. Find your funding match.

Apply to funders who are a good match for your specific agency and program. You can accomplish this by conducting thorough research to discover funders who have a history of giving to agencies like yours in your geographic area for amounts that are similar to your request. You must do your homework to be successful. Research tools you can use are:

- Foundation Center (www.foundationcenter.org)
- Foundation Search (www.foundationsearch.com)
- Guide Star (www.guidestar.org)

Partner with an experienced grant-writing consultant. You can check out the services of Grant Pathways at www.grantpathways.com.

3. Promote and develop community collaborations.

Funders are very interested in collaborations between agencies. They especially appreciate non-duplication of efforts and community partnerships that improve services and reduce costs.

4. Contact potential funders.

Once you have identified potential funders, try to contact them first by phone or email if they provide this information. While many foundations do not encourage or allow personal contact, there are those that do. Prepare for the call or contact by writing an outline or making notes for yourself. Call steps or email points you should make:

- Introduce yourself and tell them that you are contacting them to introduce your agency for the ultimate purpose of applying for funding.
- Provide a brief, but thorough description of the agency to include your mission statement, length of service in the community, target population, need your agency fills, successes in terms of numbers served, positive outcomes, staff size and annual budget.
- Ask them if they would be interested in receiving a full proposal for funding from your agency. Also, just in case they ask, know the amount you are planning to apply for and for what specific purpose.

5. Engage your board.

Your agency's board members should be some of your most significant donors. All of your board members should be giving financially to the agency in a significant manner (i.e. aside from their church, their largest charitable gifts per year go to your agency). Foundations will want to see that your board members believe strongly in the agency and show this in a practical manner by financially supporting the agency. Most funders will not financially support an agency whose board members do not significantly support the agency financially. If your board members are not giving at this level, be sure to find board training for them so that they can learn their true responsibilities. And remember, GrantPathways offers excellent board training service.

6. Enlist the help of a qualified grant writer.

While the expertise of your grant writer will not solely determine if you receive a grant, it is nonetheless important that your grant writer be highly qualified to prepare your applications. Whether your writer is an employee or consultant, be sure that they have the ability to write professionally and succinctly. They should also be detail-oriented so that they can thoroughly follow the application instructions. We advise that you hire a grant writer who has had proven success in the field. (Like GrantPathways' writers!)

7. Review your budget story.

Did you know that your budget tells the funder your story in numbers? Pay careful attention that your calculations are correct and that your budget is balanced. Give the appropriate amount of detail in your numbers and budget narrative. Generally, strive to show a financial need for the program while demonstrating sufficient financial soundness for the agency and providing adequate details about exactly how you will spend the funder's grant dollars.

8. Prepare your key documents.

Most funders require numerous documents in the form of attachments to your application. Thoroughly review the application as you begin, make a list of the attachments you will need, and begin gathering them early in the process. Examples of attachments include budgets, audits, 990s, organizational charts, resumes, etc. Do not submit your application without the required attachments! It will be rejected.

9. Have your grant reviewed.

If at all possible, have someone outside of your agency, preferably an experienced grant writer; review your application before you submit it. The outside reviewer provides critical insight into how a funder will read your application. As an outsider, the reviewer will be more likely to spot omissions and inconsistencies, those dreaded typos, and, since they do not know your industry, can tell you if you have used too much jargon or if your message is unclear.

10. Present a strong needs statement.

It is your job in the application to demonstrate the need for your services with examples, statistics, hard facts and stories. Be sure that you provide convincing and community-specific information that directly relates to your program. Be careful not to use blanket types of needs statements. For example, don't say, "Homelessness is a problem in our community." Instead, provide the funder with current homelessness statistics specific to your city. Provide quotes from concerned public officials about the problem. Use statistics to demonstrate how the problem has grown. Endeavor to tell a story about the experience of a homeless person or family in your community. Be sure to do your homework in this area before you write your proposal.

BONUS TIP:

Carefully craft a "case statement" that tells the funder why your agency's services provide the best answer to the community need. The statement should include information about the professionalism of your agency, its past successes, how it uniquely addresses this need and what could happen if your agency did not provide these services. This case statement becomes a key communication tool for all future communications and grant proposals.

Grant Pathways is available to help your organization navigate a path to successful grant funding. Call or email today for your personalized assessment at (813) 453-4891 or info@grantpathways.com.