CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE GRANT PROPOSALS*

A successful grant proposal is one that is well-prepared, thoughtfully planned, and concisely packaged. The potential applicant should become familiar with all of the pertinent program criteria related to the program from which assistance is sought. Agencies may wish to refer to the information contact person for a description before developing a proposal to obtain information such as whether funding is available, when applicable deadlines occur, and the process used by the grantor agency for accepting applications or proposals. Applicants should remember that the basic requirements, application forms, information, and procedures vary with every agency and organization making a grant award.

INITIAL PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Ideas for the Proposal

When developing ideas for a proposal, it is important to determine if the idea has been considered in the applicant's locality or state. A careful check should be made with legislators, area government agencies and related public and private agencies which may currently have grant awards or contracts to do similar work. If a similar program already exists, the applicant may need to reconsider submitting the proposed project, particularly if duplication of effort is perceived. If significant differences or improvements in the proposed project's goals can be clearly established, it may be worthwhile to pursue grants and financial assistance.

Community Support

Community support for most proposals is essential. Once a proposal summary is developed, look for individuals or groups representing academic, political, professional and lay organizations who may be willing to support the proposal in writing. The type and caliber of community support is critical in the initial and subsequent review phases. Numerous letters of support can be persuasive to a granter agency or organization. Do not overlook support from local government agencies and public officials. Letters of endorsement detailing exact areas of project sanction and commitment are often requested as part of a proposal to a Federal agency. Several months may be required to develop letters of endorsement since something of value (i.e., buildings, staff, services) is sometimes negotiated between the parties involved.

Many agencies require, in writing, affiliation agreements (a mutual agreement to share services between agencies) and building space commitments prior to either grant approval or award. A useful method of generating community support may be to hold meetings with the top decision-makers in the community who would be concerned with the subject matter of the proposal. The forum for discussion may include a query into the merits of the proposal, development of a contract of support for the proposal to generate data in support of the proposal, or development of a strategy to create proposal support from a large number of community groups.

* The information contained in this chapter is designed primarily for agencies requesting funding from public sector/government sources. Private funding sources often have different requirements, although the information in this chapter will still serve as helpful, general guidance.

Identification of a Funding Resource

Once a potential grantor agency is identified, contact the organization/agency and ask for a grant application kit or formatting instructions for grant proposals. Agencies may also want to get to know some of the grantor agency personnel. Ask for suggestions, criticisms, and advice about the proposed project. In many cases, the more agency personnel know about the proposal, the better the chance of support and of an eventual favorable decision. Sometimes it is useful to send the proposal summary to a specific agency official in a separate cover letter, and ask for review and comments at the earliest possible convenience. Always check with the agency to determine its preference if this approach is under consideration.

If the review is unfavorable and differences cannot be resolved, ask the examining agency (official) to suggest another department or agency or organization which may be interested in the proposal. A personal visit to the agency's office or headquarters is also important. A visit not only establishes face-to-face contact, but also may bring out some essential details about the proposal or help secure literature and references from the agency's library or information resources.

The applicant should carefully study the eligibility requirements for each program under consideration. The agency may learn that it is required to provide services otherwise unintended such as a service to particular client groups, or involvement of specific institutions. It may necessitate the modification of the original concept in order for the project to be eligible for funding. Questions about eligibility should be discussed with the appropriate program officer.

Deadlines for submitting applications are often not negotiable. They are usually associated with strict timetables for agency review. Some programs have more than one application deadline during the fiscal year. Applicants should plan proposal development around the established deadlines.

Getting Organized to Write the Proposal

Throughout the proposal writing stage, keep a notebook handy to write down ideas. Periodically, try to connect ideas by reviewing the notebook. Never throw away written ideas during the grant writing stage. Maintain a file labeled "ideas" or some other convenient title and review the ideas from time to time. The file should be easily accessible. The gathering of documents such as articles of incorporation, tax exemption certificates, and by-laws should be completed, if possible, before the writing begins.

REVIEW

Criticism

At some point, perhaps after the first or second draft is completed, seek out a neutral third party to review the proposal working draft for continuity, clarity and reasoning. Ask for constructive criticism at this point, rather than waiting for the grantor agency to volunteer this information during the review cycle. For example, has the writer made unsupported assumptions or used jargon or excessive language in the proposal?

Signature

Most proposals are made to institutions rather than individuals. Often signatures of chief executive/administrative officials are required. Check to make sure they are included in the proposal where appropriate.

Neatness

Proposals should be typed, collated, copied, and packaged correctly and neatly (according to agency instructions, if any.) Each package should be inspected to ensure uniformity from cover to cover. Binding may require either clamps or hard covers. Check with the grantor agency to determine its preference. A neat, organized, and attractive proposal package can leave a positive impression with the reader about the proposal contents.

Mailing

A cover letter should always accompany a proposal. Be sure to check with the grantor agency about mailing preferences. Also, methods of delivery (standard mail, overnight shipping, etc.) may also be dictated by the time between submission of the proposal and the deadline for the proposal's arrival at the grantor agency. Make sure there is enough time for the proposals to reach their destinations.

WRITING THE GRANT PROPOSAL

The Basic Components of a Proposal

There are many formats used for grant proposals. Each grantor agency will have specific guidelines about what needs to be included within a grant proposal and in what order they should be listed. As a general guideline, the following generic proposal format is discussed. Before using the generic proposal discussed here, be sure that your agency has investigated the preferences or requirements of the grantor agency to which you are addressing your proposal.

There are eight basic components to creating a solid proposal package: (1) the proposal summary; (2) introduction of organization; (3) the problem statement or needs assessment; (4) project objectives; (5) project methods or design; (6) project evaluation; (7) future funding; and (8) the project budget. The following will provide an overview of these components.

The Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals

The proposal summary outlines the proposed project and should appear at the beginning of the proposal. It could be in the form of a cover letter or a separate page, but should definitely be brief-no longer than two or three paragraphs. The summary would be most useful if it were prepared after the proposal had been developed in order to encompass all the key summary points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. It is this document that becomes the cornerstone of your proposal, and the initial impression it gives will be critical to the success of your venture. In many cases, the summary will be the first part of the proposal package seen by agency officials and very possibly could be the only part of the package that is carefully reviewed before the decision is made to consider the project any further.

Introduction: Presenting a Credible Applicant or Organization

The applicant should gather data about its organization from all available sources. Most proposals require a description of an applicant's organization to describe its past and present operations. Some features to consider:

- A brief biography of board members and key staff or members.
- The organization's goals, philosophy, track record with other grantors, and any success stories.
- The data should be relevant to the goals of the grantor or agency and should establish the applicant's credibility.

The Problem Statement: Stating the Purpose at Hand

The problem statement (or needs assessment) is a key element of a proposal that makes a clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed. The best way to collect information about the problem is to conduct and document both a formal and informal needs assessment for a program in the target or service area. The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal. Areas to document include:

- The purpose for developing the proposal.
- The beneficiaries who are they and how will they benefit?
- The social and economic costs to be affected.
- The nature of the problem (provide as much hard evidence as possible).
- How the applicant organization came to realize the problem exists and what is currently being done about the problem.
- The remaining alternatives available when funding has been exhausted. Explain what will happen to the project and the impending implications.
- Most importantly, the specific manner through which problems might be solved.
- Review the resources needed, considering how they will be used and to what end.

There is a considerable body of literature on the exact assessment techniques to be used. Any local, regional, or state government planning office, or local university offering coursework in planning and evaluation techniques, should be able to provide excellent background references. Types of data that may be collected include: historical, geographic, quantitative, factual, statistical, and philosophical information, as well as studies completed by colleges, and literature searches from public or university libraries.

Project Objectives: Goals and Desired Outcome

Program objectives refer to specific activities in a proposal. It is necessary to identify all objectives related to the goals to be reached and the methods to be employed to achieve the stated objectives. Consider quantities or things measurable and refer to a program statement and the outcome of proposed activities when developing a well-stated objective.

The figures used should be verifiable. Remember, if the proposal is funded, the stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress, so be realistic. There is literature available to help identify and write program objectives.

Program Methods and Program Design: A Plan of Action

The program design refers to how the project is expected to work and solve the stated problem. Sketch out the following:

- The activities to occur along with the related resources and personnel needed to operate the project (inputs).
- A flow chart of the organizational features of the project may be a helpful addition. Describe how the parts interrelate, where personnel will be needed, and what they are expected to do.

It may be useful to devise a diagram of the program design. For example, draw a three-column block. Each column is headed by one of the parts (inputs, throughputs and outputs), and on the left (next to the first column) specific program features should be identified (i.e., implementation, staffing, procurement, and systems development). In the grid, specify something about the program design, for example, assume the first column is labeled inputs and the first row is labeled personnel. On the grid, one might specify under inputs five counselors to conduct a juvenile arson prevention program. The throughput might be to counsel the juveniles, monitor vocational training and academic tutoring, and maintain records; outputs might be to document a 25% decline in juvenile arson incidents. This type of procedure will help to conceptualize both the scope and detail of the project.

Whenever possible, justify in narrative the course of action taken. The most economical method should be used that does not compromise or sacrifice project quality. The financial expenses associated with performance of the project will later become points of negotiation with the Federal grantor program staff. If everything is not carefully justified in writing in the proposal, the approved project may resemble less of the original concept. Carefully consider the pressures of the proposed implementation, that is, the time and money needed to acquire each part of the plan.

A Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) chart could be useful and supportive in justifying some proposals. Highlight the innovative features of the proposal which could be considered distinct from other proposals under consideration. Whenever possible, use appendices to provide details, supplementary data, references, and information requiring in-depth analysis. These types of data, although supportive of the proposal, if included in the body of the design, could detract from its readability. Appendices provide the proposal reader with immediate access to details if and when clarification of an idea, sequence, or conclusion is required. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendices.

Evaluations: Product and Process Analysis

The evaluation component is two-fold: (1) product evaluation; and (2) process evaluation. Product evaluation addresses results that can be attributed to the project, as well as the extent to which the project has satisfied its desired objectives. Process evaluation addresses how the project was conducted, in terms of consistency with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan.

Federal agencies may require some form of program evaluation among grantees. The requirements of the proposed project should be explored carefully. Evaluations may be conducted by an internal staff member, an evaluation firm or both. The applicant should state the amount of time needed to evaluate, how the feedback will be distributed among the proposed staff, and a schedule for review and comment for this type of communication. Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle or end of a project, but the applicant should specify a start-up time. It is practical to submit an evaluation design at the start of a project for two reasons:

1. Convincing evaluations require the collection of appropriate data before and during program operations; and

2. If the evaluation design cannot be prepared at the outset, then a critical review of the program design may be advisable.

Even if the evaluation design has to be revised as the project progresses, it is much easier and cheaper to modify a good design. If the problem is not well defined and carefully analyzed for cause and effect relationships, then a good evaluation design may be difficult to achieve. Sometimes a pilot study is needed to begin the identification of facts and relationships. Often a thorough literature search may be sufficient.

Evaluation requires both coordination and agreement among program decision makers (if known). Above all, the federal grantor agency's requirements should be highlighted in the evaluation design. Also, federal grantor agencies may require specific evaluation techniques such as designated data formats (an existing information collection system) or they may offer financial inducements for voluntary participation in a national evaluation study. The applicant should ask specifically about these points. Also, consult the criteria for selecting proposals section of the catalog program description to determine the exact evaluation methods to be required for the program if funded.

Future Funding: Long-Term Project Planning

Describe a plan for continuation beyond the grant period, and/or the availability of other resources necessary to implement the grant. Discuss maintenance and future program funding if program is for construction activity. Account for other needed expenditures if program includes purchase of equipment.

The Proposal Budget: Planning the Budget

Funding levels in grantor organizations and agency programs change yearly. It is useful to review the appropriations over the past several years to try to project future funding levels. However, it is safer to never anticipate that the income from the grant will be the sole support for the project. This consideration should be given to the overall budget requirements, and in particular, to budget line items most subject to inflationary pressures. Restraint is important in determining inflationary cost projections (avoid padding budget line items,) but attempt to anticipate possible future increases.

Some vulnerable budget areas are utilities, rental of buildings and equipment, food, telephones, insurance, and transportation. Budget adjustments are sometimes made after the grant award, but this can be a lengthy process. Be certain that implementation, continuation, and phase-down costs can be met. Consider costs associated with leases, evaluation systems, hard/soft match requirements, audits, development, implementation and maintenance of information and accounting systems, and other long-term financial commitments.

A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Some areas in need of an evaluation for consistency are: (1) the salaries in the proposal in relation to those of the applicant organization should be similar; (2) if new staff persons are being hired, additional space and equipment should be considered, as necessary; (3) if the budget calls for an equipment purchase, it should be the type allowed by the grantor agency; (4) if additional space is required, the increase in insurance should be supported; (5) if an indirect cost rate applies to the proposal, the division between direct and indirect costs should not be in conflict, and the aggregate budget totals should refer directly to the approved formula; and (6) if matching costs are required, the contributions to the matching fund should be taken out of the budget unless otherwise specified in the application instructions.

If pursuing a grant from a federal agency, it is very important to become familiar with government guidelines for federal domestic assistance.

INTERACTION AND NETWORKING

Completing a grant proposal is a major step in the route to a grant from the federal government, a state government, a local government, or a private source. Interaction with these organizations and agencies may assist a fire and EMS department in their quest for grant funding, as well as help them identify when opportunities arise for grants and when the "timing is right" for grant proposals. Interaction and networking are key elements in marketing the agency, the grant proposal and finding identifying new funding sources.

State Fire and EMS Offices

Each state fire and/or EMS office is responsible for the direction of fire and EMS at the state level with requirements filtering down to the local level. Most state authority is supported by state legislation which enables the agency to carry out its responsibilities, establishes limits of authority, and provides some appropriations from state funds. The state office may be a separate authority or it may be housed within another state agency, such as the state health department or highway/transportation department. Functions of the state office include:

- Regulation of provision of fire protection and ambulance or medical transportation services
- Establishment of training standards for fire and EMS personnel
- Coordination of communication systems
- Disaster planning, response, and financial assistance
- Data collection
- System evaluation

It is important to understand the political authority and activities of the state fire and EMS offices in order to successfully participate in the system at the local level. Because most state EMS offices are within the state's public health system, authority and legislative initiatives should also take a public health or "preventive" approach.

When attempting to receive funding from state offices, it is essential to understand the laws and associated regulations that have an impact on particular areas of the profession. To increase effectiveness when dealing with the state fire and EMS offices, agency leaders should know the answers to the following questions:

- What does the state fire and/or EMS office do?
- How are its activities authorized?
- Who is involved with implementation?
- What other statutes or regulations exist?

Other Associated Organizations

In addition to understanding the state's lead fire and EMS agencies, it is also important to be aware of other influential organizations. Lead agencies in every state exchange information and services with many other organizations, agencies, and support groups. One entity—and an integral part of the EMS system structure—is the state-level advisory board or council. Although considered to be advisory in nature, this board or council is usually politically strong, and its recommendations to the state EMS lead agency can significantly impact the direction of the EMS program. Again, effective preparation for influencing this agency involves researching the answers to important questions:

- When and where does the council meet?
- Who are the members?
- What EMS areas do they represent?
- How often are they appointed and by whom?

Other organizations that can affect change in the EMS arena are state affiliates of various EMS organizations, the state board of nursing, and the state medical society. Also, in addition to the state lead agency, there are several related state agencies to consider in EMS initiatives. Each state's governor's office has an Office of Highway Safety, which has a parent agency at the national level, the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration of the Department of Transportation (NHTSA/DOT). This national office provides limited funding for EMS initiatives. Since the state office of highway safety represents the governor's office, it becomes a valuable link in the network chain, not only for financial purposes but also for its political support. Spin-off programs administered by this office include passenger restraints, motorcycle safety, alcohol and drug use, and impaired driving programs, all of which are related to improving emergency medical care. New program initiatives, legislation, and other activities should include the involvement of these offices from the beginning.

Influencing Public Officials/Decision Makers

The following steps serve as a guide when approaching or communicating with public officials and decision makers about a grant proposal.

Planning

- Research the process
- Determine the decision makers and individuals/groups with influence
- Study the decision makers and their stands/points of view
- Gather facts, figures, numbers to support position
- Anticipate concerns/arguments

Begin Before Help is Needed

- Attend functions
- Get to know them personally

Approach

- Make them want to do it!
- Present in decision maker's terms and best interests
- Approach the decision maker strategically & bring support
- Keep careful records
- Persevere

Follow-up

- Thank everyone
- Keep in touch—NURTURE YOUR NETWORK!

RESOURCES

United States Government Manual
OMB Circular Nos. A-87, A-102, A-110, and A-128, and Executive Order 12372
Publications Office
Office of Administration
Room 2200, 725 Seventeenth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Government Printing Office (GPO) Resources

The government documents identified above as available from the GPO can be requested by writing to:
Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Regional and Federal Depository Libraries

Regional libraries can arrange for copies of Government documents through an inter-library loan. All Federal Depository Libraries will receive copies of the Catalog directly. A list of depository and regional libraries is available by writing:
Chief, Library Division
Superintendent of Documents
Stop SLL
Washington, D.C. 20402

The Grantsmanship Center

The Grantsmanship Center is an institution well-versed in grantsmanship training, proposal writing, and other grants-related information. Persons wishing to obtain information should write:
The Grantsmanship Center
Department DD
P.O. Box 6210
Los Angeles, CA 90014