Best practices for writing proposals: How to speak to funders

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Writing a strong proposal

Tip #1: Get to the point in your cover letter

• What is your mission?
  – Few things are more important than your mission.
  – Make sure:
    – It describes what your organization was created to do.
    – It is clear, concise and to the point. Please no ambiguity

• What is your budget?
  – Be sure to develop a budget that shows all costs associated with your program.
  – Make sure there is a clear cost justification
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Tip #1: Get to the point in your cover letter (cont.)

- How much do you need?
  - Don’t be afraid to ask for what you need
  - Don’t expect one or two organizations to meet your funding needs. Funders like to see multiple sources of funding so that your organization remains healthy should you lose a few of those sources

- How will the money be used?
  - Does it reflect your mission?
  - Is there a quantifiable investment return?
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Tip #2: Do your homework

- Know what kind of support the funder provides and direct your request accordingly.
  - Research past funding decisions and how they were presented publicly.
  - Check with your Regional Association of Grantmakers (RAG)
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Tip #3: Describe your organization

- Give a brief history of your organization
  - Don’t tell them where you’re going until you’ve told them where you’ve been...

Successes:
- What have you accomplished?
- What was the impact to clients?
- What was the impact to the community?

Failures:
- Don’t hid misjudgments. State what happened and your response to it.
- Demonstrate you can analyze, measure, and take appropriate action.
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Tip #3: Describe your organization. (cont.)

- What programs or services do they offer?
- What are your program or service objectives?
- What is the number of people and geographic area served?
- How do you measure success?
- Who are your allies in the community?
- Who do you complete against?
An organization is only as knowledgeable as the staff.

- List your staff and their titles
  - Include summary biographies
- List their job function
  - Staff work experience and skill level should be consistent with the job function
  - Showcase specific contributions made by individuals to
  - Bring the staff list to life.

Tip #4: Show your proficiency.
Tip #5: Explain why they should fund you.

- Explain your uniqueness.
- Delineate the need and relevance of your programs or services to the audience you serve.
- If there are other organizations with similar mission serving the same population and geography, then distinguish yourself.
Tip #6: Demonstrate fiscal fitness.

- Non-profit organizations should be managed with the same care and considerations as for-profit organizations.
- Provide current year income and expense plan.
- Provide previous fiscal year income and expense actuals (audited if possible).
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Tip #7: Show who’s guiding your organization

• List officers and board members
  – The success of any organization is anchored in good solid governance
  – Officers and board members must possess the skills and knowledge necessary to guide the organization

• Provide evidence of long-range plan.
  – Where are you going?
  – How will you get there?
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Tip #8: Provide program information

• Describe your program or project

• Give a timeline for implementation and evaluation

• What is the budget?

• Where is your support coming from?
  – Provide a line item list of proposed and committed sources of funding

• List what type of volunteer contributions are needed for the program or project to be successful, and how you plan to secure this support
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Tip #9: Bring your mission to life

• Include marketing and communications tools:
  – Your annual report.
  – Brochures that describe your programs and services.

• Use images to tell your story: pictures of those who benefit from your work can explain much more than words.
Building relationships with funders is more than lunch!

Stay on their radar. Make sure funders are aware of your successes and activities.

- Leave a *brief* message in their voicemail (Do not ask for money at this time).
- Make sure you include them on your mailing lists and newsletters
- Send copies of news and other articles that visually demonstrate your mission at work.
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**Tip #11: Go the extra mile.**

- Go where the funders go.
  - Attend your Regional Association of Grantmakers (RAG) meetings.

- Seek out opportunities to speak on solutions your organization can provide to specific community needs.

- Drive the solution not your need!
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Resource Materials


• A Media Training Guide for Affordable Housing Advocates
  – from The Campaign for Affordable Housing

• The Giving Forum
  (connect with regional associations of grantmakers.)
  – http://givingforum.org/

• National Council on Foundations
  – http://www.cof.org/
Thank you