

# GRANT TIPS FOR GRANT ADMINISTRATORS



Units of municipal government face great financial challenges these days. Property taxes are almost flat-lined, and the cost of providing public services escalates with the cost of doing business. This article is intended for grant managers/administrators and focuses on finding the right grant funding opportunities and well-planned grant proposal writing.



## Forward-Thinking Grant Seeking

Here are some easy steps to help you organize your grant seeking priorities when you're reading a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA):

- **First**, look at what's due in the next 30 days. Read the NOFA and determine your eligibility as a grant applicant. Look for the number of grants that will be awarded; you want to apply when there are at least 20 or more awards available. Also, check the grant award range (will the grant cover your proposed project's cost in full?) and how many narrative pages are required in the grant application narrative.
- **Second**, look at what's due 60 days out from today. Follow the same steps above. The difference is that now you have more time for the following: grant planning meetings, partnership input whereby you identify collaborative partners early in the grant seeking stage, and talking to funding agency staff about your chances of getting funded—all before you actually set down to write the grant application.
- **Third**, look at potential grant funding opportunities whose deadlines have passed. Why? Even though the deadlines have passed, you have a chance to: 1) call funding agency staff to inquire about the possibility of funding in the next fiscal year, 2) ask how you can become a federal or state peer reviewer to actually read and score grant applications

submitted by grant seekers, and 3) draft your grant application sections in preparation for the next fiscal year's funding cycle. Be prudent and proactive, not reactive!



## Winning Peer Review Points

- **First**, look at the grant application guidelines. Have a highlighter and a pack of sticky notes on hand. Make sure you have printed all the pages in the grant application announcement, even the addendums and attachments. Lay them out on a table or desk and have a stapler handy as well. Highlight the following: due date, form of application submission requirements, number of grants to be awarded, award range, the funding agency's contact person and their email or phone number or fax number, funding priorities, formatting instructions, and evaluation or peer review criteria.



### BE PRUDENT AND PROACTIVE

Draft your grant application sections in preparation for the next fiscal year's funding cycle

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Also, take note if you have to submit your application early (well before the federal deadline) to a state agency or a regional clearinghouse (single point of contact) prior to uploading your application to the federal e-grant portal. Put sticky notes on all pages that have instructions on what to write and how to write (font, maximum page numbers, margins, and pagination). Write on each sticky note the important nugget of information that the page contains. Now you're ready to write an award-winning grant application.

- **Second**, zero in on the evaluation or review criteria and determine how much to write for each narrative section. The review criteria will tell you what state and federal peer reviewers look for when they're reading and scoring your grant application. Write in the order of the review criteria listed in the NOFA while keeping in mind the point/percentage-weighted values for each section.

Here's an old announcement that serves as an excellent example of how narrative sections are weighted:

*Evaluation and Selection Process for the Dept. of Transportation's National Infrastructure Investments Under the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for 2010:*

- **Long-Term Outcomes:** DOT will give more weight to this criterion than to either of the Secondary Selection Criteria. In addition, this criterion has a minimum threshold requirement. Projects that are unable to demonstrate a likelihood of significant long-term benefits in any of the five long-term outcomes identified in this criterion will not proceed in the evaluation process.
- **Job Creation & Economic Stimulus:** DOT will give more weight to this criterion than to either of the Secondary Selection Criteria. This criterion will be considered after it is determined that a project demonstrates a likelihood of significant long-term benefits in at least one of the five long-term outcomes identified in the long-term outcomes criterion.
- **Innovation & Partnership:** DOT will give less weight to these criteria than to the Primary Selection Criteria. These criteria will be rated equally.

The grant making agency will always publish the peer review evaluation and selection process. In this example, Long-Term Outcomes and Job Creation & Economic Stimulus have higher peer review weights than Innovation & Partnership.

The next factor needed is the narrative page limit. For this grant funding opportunity, the narrative limit is 25 pages, single-spaced. If I were your grant writer on this application, I would devote 10 pages each to the highest weighted sections and only 5 pages to Innovation & Partnership.



## Writing Your Narrative with Ease

Focus on writing a highly competitive, comprehensive, yet concise narrative that earns the following peer review descriptors about your grant application's strengths:

- Comprehensive
- Justified
- Reasonable
- Documented
- Appropriate
- Detail-filled
- Exhaustive
- Adequate
- Thorough
- Focused
- Complete
- Demographics-supported
- Specific
- Unique
- Ability-driven
- Extensive
- Evidence-based
- Innovative
- Sound
- Qualified
- Strong
- Experience-backed
- Need-based
- Feasible



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