AFP Information Exchange

A Step-by-Step Primer on How to Obtain Large Government Grants for Nonprofits (Part 7): Reporting

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A Step-By-Step Primer on How to Obtain Large Government Grants For Nonprofits (Part 7)

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Obtaining Government Grants: Step 7—Reporting

There are many steps to applying for large government grants. Each step is equally important to securing the funding your organization needs for growth. Over the next several months, we are planning to outline, step-by-step, the general process inherent in obtaining these grants. Our hope is that other professionals advising or working within the NPO community will comment and offer their own suggestions or opinions. We believe that such productive dialog will be helpful toward bringing more efficiencies (and money!) to nonprofits. This is the seventh and final part of this series: Reporting.

This article focuses on the post-grant award aspect of the grant application process—namely reporting on the results achieved. In step one, we introduced how to prove on paper that your organization had the capacity to partner with the Federal government and become a vendor. In step two, you addressed how to research to generate support for your grant application. In step three, we discussed how the case for support should be written to align with the Federal agency's objectives for the community. In step four, we focused on writing the application. In step five, we analyzed how logic models and program evaluation factor into the application. Here in step six, we explained what to include in the program or grant budget, and what format is required. In our final step seven, we focus on a critical issue to the grant writing process: reporting.

STEP 7. Reporting

Reporting is one of the most critical components of the grant writing process. This article focuses on two key points: (1) reports and reporting generally and (2) information to collect for reporting purposes.

Reports and Reporting Generally

Generally, the type of reporting required is typically consistent with the type of grant you have been awarded. (Typically, grants are for research, community development, capital construction or development, or programs). Regardless of the grant type, however, once a nonprofit organization receives government funding, it has responsibility for the implementation of the project supported and for reporting the results achieved. The grantee must also monitor the performance of the project to assure adherence to performance goals, time schedules, or other requirements as appropriate to the project or the terms of the grant.

There are four major types of project reports: (1) annual reports, (2) interim reports, (3) final reports, and (4) project outcomes reports. It is important for the development officer to work closely with the project directors within the organization to ensure compliance with the applicable Federal requirements for the grants received for each of these reports. Annual project reports are required for all grants. Interim reports are typically used to update the progress of a project any time during or before the award period expires. Final reports are required for all standard and continuing grants, cooperative agreements and fellowships. A project outcome report is a report written for new and existing awards, specifically for the public, that provides insight into the outcomes of program.

In addition, most government grants required rigorous reporting to multiple agencies. The type of reporting can be a deterrent for many nonprofit agencies that do not have the capacity to track the type of outcomes required. Make sure you understand the type of reporting required before you apply and that your organization has reviewed they type of format, project design, and recording requirements.

Finally, make sure your reporting is submitted within the time frame allotted by the agency. If you are not able to submit a complete report, be sure to submit your findings in writing, explaining why all of the information is not available. Failure to complete the required reporting can have severe consequences, such as loss of future funding, or having to refund the funds allocated for the program.

Information to Collect for Reporting Purposes

Reporting begins when you apply for the grant. For example, in step five, you learned how to prepare a logic model. This is a comprehensive reporting mechanism designed to electronically give grant outcomes to the government agency. Therefore, as soon as you submit your grant and it is awarded, your reporting period begins.

There are five types of information that is essential to collect for the various types of reports previously discussed. They are: (1) Key outcomes and achievements, (2) Participants, (3) Impact, (4) Expenses, and (5) Outcomes. Each are discussed below.

Key outcomes and achievements

Key outcomes are the high level or executive level points you need to show as part of your report. The following questions will help you focus on these points.

- What opportunities or achievements have been achieved toward the overall project goals and objectives?
- How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?
- What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?
- What did you create or produce?
- What are the time segments related to each achievement?
- What costs are associated with each outcome?

Another strategy that works well to determine your key outcomes is to list your goals, major activities, and specific objectives to be achieved. Answering these questions can also help you determine the key outcomes for your program or project.

- What was accomplished under the goals you defined for your grant?
- What were the major activities of your grant?

- What major activities has your organization undertaken to achieve these goals?
- What were the results that you obtained?

For other grants, such as those funding research projects, the end result may be a journal article, book, thesis dissertation, conference paper or presentation, a new technology or technique, patent(s), inventions, or a new product. Reporting in these instances may require you to submit a PDF files with images, tables, charts, or other graphics in support of the research. It is important to carefully review the size and format of the data transmission allowed during reporting if online results are required.

Participants

Almost all grants require reporting of the number of participants in the program, project or research. Carefully review the reporting periods required; are they daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually? If the reporting period required has no activity, it is appropriate to enter, "no activity" during that time. For program grants and research, there will most likely be specific questions that must be answered regarding the population served or tested. The grant instructions should give you additional information on participants such as:

- What individuals have worked on the project?
- What organizations have been involved as partners? (List name, address and contact information for each).
- Have other collaborators or contacts been involved?
- What was each entity’s specific contribution to the project?

Impact

Many nonprofit organizations receive grant funding, and the impacts or outcomes of the project are not as anticipated. It is important to be exact in your reporting. Remember; one of the primary goals of reporting is to create model programs that are replicable. If your goals and objectives were not obtained, address why they were not. The following questions may help you with discussing impact.

- What can you change in the future to achieve the desired outcomes?
- What is the impact on the population served by the project?
- What is the impact on other populations, or the community at large?
- What is the impact on the project on the nonprofit organization?
- What is the impact on the physical resources, or general infrastructure of the organization and community?
- What is the impact on the nonprofit resources?
- Was there sufficient funding to complete the desired goals?
- What IT resources were needed?
- Was the grant funding sufficient to cover these costs?

Expenses

As discussed in conjunction with the budget in step six, organizational reviews are intended to help assure that expenditures are allowable, necessary and reasonable for the conduct of the project. Documentation for each expenditure or action affecting the grant should reflect appropriate organizational reviews or approvals, which should be made in advance of the action. Remember, the proposed action should:

- Be consistent with grant terms and conditions;
- Be consistent with the grant policies;
- Represent effective utilization of resources; and
- Not constitute a change in objective or scope.

Remember to carefully review the rules of direct verses indirect costs when assigning grant funds to various expenditures related to your program. There are many changes that can have a significant impact on expenditures. For instance, in construction, a "change order" may be issued by an agency; which is an unanticipated deviation from the original plan. Change orders can result in an agency mandating thousands of unfunded dollars to be spent in order to meet compliance issues. In many cases; competing agencies will issue conflicting change orders that can result in legal issues for the nonprofit to address. For instance, the nonprofit may meet Federal standards of compliance with environmental testing yet fail to meet the local or state standards.

It is not uncommon for policies to change during the implementation of a program or project. Therefore it is important for the nonprofit to be as current as possible on issues related to their activities, such as human resources regulations, health requirements, environmental standards, zoning laws, etc.

Try to anticipate challenges to completion of your project. Questions like the following may help with this part of the report:

- Are their special requirements?
- Are you working on a project that requires sign off prior to advancing to the next stage?
- Will you be using contractors to complete any phase of your program, and if so, do they require special credentials?

General Outcomes

When reporting, keep in mind that the goal of most government programs is to create replicable solutions to community problems. How will the results your organization achieved be useful to others who face similar challenges?

In terms of reporting on general outcomes, the following questions may help guide your report:

- If the goals and outcomes were not achieved, did you make adjustments, modifications or changes during the program to correct the issues?

- What problems did you incur with bureaucracy that caused an unanticipated delay or problem with your program or project?
- How did you resolve these issues?

Conclusion

Reporting is an important component to the grant writing process. By focusing on key outcomes and achievements, participants, impact, expenses, and general outcomes, reporting can be a far less daunting task.

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About Cathy D. Cessna, RDH, MPA, CFRE: Senior level private and public sector decision maker; fundraiser, marketing lead, advertising sales, medical software sales; affordable housing development. Eleven years of experience - Adjunct Professor; Marketing, Fundraising, Finance, and Non-profit Legal Issues. Non-profit consultant/public sector: Volunteer: Wilmington Montessori School, Junior League of Wilmington, RHD Howell, Delaware Military Academy, Wellness Center Delaware, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Tower Hill School, Delaware Dental Hygiene Assn.

About Charlie Vincent, Esq.: Charlie has almost 15 years of marketing and business experience across different sectors in Delaware and Pennsylvania, including strategic business planning and marketing, event planning, and fundraising for non-profits, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. As an attorney, Charlie developed a unique understanding and perspective of how different clients think in terms of time, budget, and results. These legal experiences, combined with his marketing and business background, enabled him early in his legal career to help two of largest legal non-profits in Delaware with the planning and execution of multiple successful fundraising events. Charlie formed Innovincent LLC in 2014 to help other non-profits, businesses, and individuals with strategic planning, marketing, event planning, and fundraising needs.

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