

City Connect Detroit's Top 10 Tips for Successful Grant Seeking

Why do grant seekers often find the fund development process difficult? Usually, it's because they are not as well prepared as they could be. Seeking grants is like running a race. Successful runners not only train themselves, they study the track, or field, before attempting to run on it. Likewise, grant seekers who prepare themselves while learning about ever-changing funding opportunities set themselves up for greater success.

In the ongoing effort to attract greater shares of national foundation and federal government dollars to the Motor City and the state of Michigan, City Connect Detroit has created a top-ten list for grant seekers. Treat this list like a personal training regimen. We are confident that organizations that follow this list in its entirety will become the equivalent to well-trained, knowledgeable runners, and become more successful in raising funds. Good luck.

1) Start with the end in mind. Outcome-based programming is the best way to create innovative programming.

Ever heard of 'profitable philanthropy?' It's a good concept to know, since most funders follow it. It means they fund projects that have firm deliverables – healthier children, success in school, safer communities, etc. In writing your proposal, emphasize the end results that the grant maker will be purchasing with their funding. Your program is their investment. They expect a return.

2) Know your funding source. Familiarity and knowledge of key contacts saves extra steps and builds your relationship with the funder.

This step is like taking a survey walk around the track before running full speed. Winning grant seekers have something in common. They contact funders before and during the proposal-writing process. Estimates show that this approach improves your chance of success by as much as 300%. Nice odds. Call the grantor. Get the application information, ask for suggestions, criticism and advice.

3) Match up. Align your priorities to the funder's.

This step compliments number two. Grant makers want to support projects that advance their priorities. They want to give money away, but it has to go to the right project. Whether submitting a concept paper, requesting a preliminary review or meeting with them, clearly state how your program will align with and advance *their* goals. These are especially good tactics because they often reveal core thoughts that accompany what the funder states on paper. You may learn the funder's view of the world, which you can then express or address in your proposal.

4) Time doesn't walk, it sprints. Plan to rush, and stick to your timetable.

The best way to beat the clock is to run, or prepare, as if time is running short. Deadlines ought to be beaten, not just met. And remember, time extensions are rarely, if ever, granted.

5) Use peer reviews and local resources like City Connect Detroit. They can provide insight (and inroads) to national foundation and federal government dollars.

Think of the track and field metaphor used in the introduction. Specifically, the notion of getting a feel for the course. Using local resources can be educational. You may find technical support for writing your proposal. You may also learn of similar projects in your area. That knowledge will help you avoid duplicating what already exists. Check with state legislators, local government and other public and private agencies to find grants or complimentary programs close to home.

6) Conduct careful evaluation. You'll learn the bottom line. That is, is your program effective, and do the participants want you back?

The opportunity to secure, and eventually renew, funding can be lost if your project has no track record. Conduct a pilot. Neutral test groups can be used either to help you tighten loose programmatic edges, find where you have the most or least impact or identify your true area of expertise.

7) Collaboration empowers you. Seek to combine resources with programs and organizations that strengthen your case, and your capacity, to achieve serious results.

Any application that involves multiple partners and collaboration puts a smile on funders' faces. The local support that you were encouraged to seek in point number six, for instance, can lead to the development of a great team concept. It's wise to embrace this idea.

8) Keep your nose clean. A good professional reputation is worth a thousand opportunities.

This needs little explanation. Right? The past becomes the present when you're being considered for funding. Integrity, organization and execution = a pro.

9) Spend money in the open. Audits and accountability are the hallmark of reliable programs.

Build on your strength as a solid, well-run organization with a history of sound management, as well as achievement of demonstrated results. This, according to many funders, is the albatross of otherwise great programs. You can be a great service

administrator, but two of the most important questions from your fiduciary will be, how are you using your funding? Can you show a trail? If your program is accountable, you're good. If not, it's a problem.

10) After you've walked the track, run a good race. In other words, write a good proposal that states your case clearly.

Take every piece of preliminary information you've acquired, and pull it together in a format that is clear and on target.