

## **Formula for a Perfect Grant Application Part II**

By Barbara Norris Coates

In Part I of this two-part article I reviewed the first two elements in the formula for creating the perfect grant application: A Proven Need + An Innovative Idea. In Part II, I'll review the last two elements: A Written Plan + A Superhero Funder. All together, these elements create a Measurable Change for the Better!

Let's look at the Written Plan portion of the formula....

Just about every grant proposal requires that you create a plan describing how you will implement the project if funded. First, sketch out the major activities and then elaborate by including details.

- Start with the end in mind. What will be achieved? Build in processes for data collection as one aspect of measuring the impact of your project.
- Can some staff members be released from their current duties to direct project activities or provide other project services? If not, think about what type of personnel positions you will need for the project and whether you can sustain new positions beyond the grant-funding period. Lay out project staff responsibilities in a timeline. Funders will want to know who is doing what to get the “work” of the project completed.
- Do you need a recruitment plan or outreach plan? If so, build this into the timeline.
- Will external partners play a role? If so, describe their roles in the timeline.
- Cross-check your timeline against the project budget. Both sections should tell the same story.

Once you have a blueprint for a fundable proposal, you need to find the appropriate funding partner. While you might be the champion of your project's cause, an interested and engaged funder is your superhero—a partner who will help you get your project off the ground and running (what is sometimes called “seed funding”).

- If the funder's website provides lists of past grantees, review the lists to see if the funder offers grants to institutions like yours and/or projects that are similar. Take note of any geographic restrictions the funder may have. Read the organization's annual report so you're aware of their strategic direction and major accomplishments. Take a look at the funder's board of directors to see if you, or any of your colleagues, have networking ties with the organization.
- After you've done your homework on the funder, call a program officer (if this is allowable. Some funders don't allow phone calls, so check first!) When you call, have a one-page concept paper in front of you that summarizes your project idea. Why is it innovative and important to achieving your goals, and how does it respond to the funding

priorities. Don't use this time to ask questions answered on the funder's website, or in its public materials.

- Remember that you're requesting money not begging for it. Contextualize your discussion with talking points regarding how your organization and the funding agency could act as partners in addressing common goals and priorities. Talk constructively about your organization and its capacity for change while emphasizing the educational challenges the grant funding will help you overcome to facilitate this change.
- Understand that funders choose projects that address their mission and highlight their commitment to and impact within the community. Mention opportunities for which the funder will receive public recognition for helping your school or district. Make an effort to include a publicity plan in your project timeline.

When you work through this simple formula for success, you'll be accomplishing the hardest part of grant writing—developing a sound, innovative, detailed concept with a plan for how it will be accomplished, and identifying a select group of funders who are the best fit to champion your cause.

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