

QUESTIONS GRANT REVIEWERS MAY HAVE ABOUT YOUR PROPOSAL

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY:

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. When was your organization founded?
2. Who founded the organization?
3. Where was it founded (city, county, and state)?
4. Why was it started (purpose then)?
5. What services does it provide now (purpose now), and who benefits from the services?
6. What is your mission statement, and how do you fulfill it today?

The funder's proposal review staff is asking themselves the following questions about the applicant organization:

Experience. Is the grant applicant a new organization or a well-established organization?

Reputation. Who founded the applicant organization? Am I familiar with this person? Has anyone on our board of trustees heard of the founder? Do we have positive or negative information on this person or persons?

Location. Is the applicant organization located in our geographic priority area.

Value association. Does the applicant organization's mission align with the funder's values or mission?

Services and benefits. Does the grant applicant provide services that the funder has previously supported in its grant awards? Does the grant applicant serve a population that the funder has a special interest in? **Focus and Purpose** Does the grant applicant continue to fulfill its original mission, or has it changed its focus since the organization was founded?

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. If the applicant organization is new, what strides has the board of directors made since applying for IRS nonprofit status?
2. If the applicant organization is experienced, what strategic planning goals were developed, and how many of the goals have been reached?
3. Has the applicant organization received any awards or recognitions from governmental units or other community organizations?
4. Have any of the applicant organization's clients or patients achieved notable success because of programs or services provided by the applicant organization?
5. Has the applicant organization completed any planning goals?
6. Has the applicant organization completed any program implementation goals?
7. Have any programs provided by the applicant organization been adopted as models by other similar organizations?

The funder's proposal review staff is asking themselves the following questions about the applicant organization:

1. Are the achievements relevant to the proposal's purpose?
2. Does the application organization know how to set goals and reach them?
3. Are the achievements in alignment with the organization's mission?
4. Are the accomplishments relevant to the purpose of the grant request? Note: The grant reader will skim through the rest of your grant proposal to see if the accomplishments listed have relevance to the program design.

CURRENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. What are the applicant organization's current programs and activities?
2. Is the applicant organization providing programs and activities that serve constituencies that we have an interest in assisting?
3. Do the programs and activities show growth from when they first started until now?
4. Are any of the programs or activities duplicating services already available in the target community for the population served?
5. Are any of the programs and activities grant-funded? If so, by whom, and what is the level of funding support?
6. Are any of the programs based on national models that have already been proven successful?
7. Is the number of constituents served clear?
8. Does the applicant organization partner with other local, regional, or state agencies to provide coordinated programs or shared activities?

The funder's proposal review staff is asking themselves the following questions about the applicant organization:

1. **Applicant organization capacity.** Does the applicant organization have too many programs going at the same time? Do the programs appear to be running smoothly? If the applicant organization only has one primary program, do I have sufficient detail in order to determine the qualitative aspects of the program?
2. **Stability.** Does the grant applicant operate programs that have spanned over one year or more?
3. **Similar target populations.** Does the grant applicant serve the same constituents in whom the funder has an interest?
4. **Ability to maintain and improve existing programs.** Does the grant applicant present a written track record for creating, maintaining, and improving its programs?

TARGET POPULATION

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. Who is the applicant organization's target population (another term for constituency)?
2. Is there more than one target population served?
3. Is this target population the primary beneficiary of the applicant organization's mission, goals, and strategic plan?
4. What is the ethnic breakdown for the applicant organization's service levels?
5. What is the age range for individuals served?
6. What is the economic status of the individuals served?
7. What are the education levels of individuals served?
8. Has the grant applicant included all relevant information about the target population in relationship to the grant proposal request area?
9. Has the target population been included in the planning for the grant proposal?
10. Are the target population's characteristics represented on the applicant organization's board?

PARTNERSHIPS

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. Who are your partners?
2. Do the partners represent a broad sector of the applicant organization's target population?
3. Are your partners' roles included in the overview?
4. What is the level of each partner's commitment; is its contribution monetary or in-kind?
5. Are the partners that you list past partners, current partners, or proposed partners for the grant proposal project?
6. Did all of your partners involved in the grant proposal project write letters of commitment or memorandums of understanding (MOU), and have you included

NEEDS STATEMENT

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. What problems, needs, or issues does this grant proposal address?
2. Who is the target population? Who are your subgroups within the target population (these should be presented by age range, ethnicity, economic status, and other social indicators)?
3. Is the target population one that the grant applicant already serves or has programs in place to serve?
4. Is this a new target population?
5. Does the applicant organization present sufficient factual information about the target population's circumstances (why they need help)?
6. Have we funded grants to solve this type of problem?

7. Is our board of trustees still interested in the grant proposal's target population?
8. Is the problem too large to solve with a single-year grant award?

PROGRAM DESIGN

Get Ready for Scrutiny by the Funder

Funders will go over the Program Design section of your grant proposal with a fine-tooth comb, reading every word and checking every line. Since there are so many parts to the whole that make up the Program Design section, I will show you how the proposal review staff breaks down each part of your Program Design section narrative. Experienced grant reviewers will scrutinize your grant proposal by asking themselves these questions:

1. Is the purpose of the grant proposal clear? (Do I know how our money will be spent, and is it stated in one sentence?)
2. Do the goals provide the needed solution for the problem or needs presented by the grant applicant? (Is there a connection between the problem and the solution?)
3. Are the goals realistic? (Are there too many goals for a one-year program design?)
4. Do the grant applicant's goals mirror our own goals for the target population? (Has this applicant done their homework on our foundation or corporate giving interests?)
5. Is there at least one objective for each goal? (Is this a strong program design?)
6. Are the objectives measurable? (Is this applicant an experienced proposal writer?)
7. Did the grant applicant include more than one type of objective? (Does this applicant understand the various types of measurable objectives?)
8. Is the timeline realistic, and does it fall into our funding cycle? (Did this applicant do their homework in regards to our deadlines and funding announcement dates?)
9. Can the grant applicant continue the grant-funded activities after the grant period ends? (Is the applicant going to be able to fund this somewhere else besides our organization once our monies run out?)

MANAGEMENT PLAN

The funder looks for your answers to the following questions:

1. Is the applicant organization's staff going to have the time and expertise to be effective grant managers? (Many funded projects fail because staffing is insufficient.)
2. Are the key personnel qualified to carry out the day-to-day activities outlined in the Program Design section? (Many funded projects fail because the staff has no experience in the project area.)
3. Is the project director allocating sufficient time to management tasks? (Many funded projects fail because the project director is not around often enough to monitor the progress of the implementation plan.)
4. If the key personnel are yet to be hired, did the applicant organization include brief job descriptions in the narrative or indicate that full job descriptions are in the attachments to the grant proposal? (Many funded projects fail because the grant applicant tries to fill technical positions with existing, unqualified staff.)

5. Have key staff members managed similar programs or projects in the past? (Many funded projects fail because inexperienced staff cannot get the project off the ground.)
6. What is the extent of their experience in working with the target population? (Many funded projects fail because staff cannot identify with needs of the target population.)

EVALUATION PLAN

The funder is looking for answers to the following questions:

1. How will the project's measurable objectives be evaluated? (This is the real test question; if you did not write measurable objectives, you cannot possibly write measurements.)
2. Does the Evaluation Plan section include more than one kind of data collection tool? (Valid data must be confirmed with myriad types of measurements.)
3. Has the grant applicant built checks and balances into the Evaluation Plan section? (Data must be reported objectively or subjectively.)
4. Is the evaluator internal or external? (Outside evaluators are preferred by most government funders.)
5. Does the grant applicant use a stakeholder evaluation team or a third-party evaluator approach? (Stakeholder evaluations are preferred by most corporate and foundation funders.)
6. How frequent will we receive evaluation reports? (Funders want to be kept abreast of project findings on a frequent basis.)
7. How will the findings of the evaluation be disseminated to stakeholders? (Funders consider themselves stakeholders, along with your board, end recipients, and the community-at-large. They want to know how your grant-funded project impacted its stakeholders.)
8. How will the findings of the evaluation be shared with other similar agencies? (Funders want your findings shared with other similar organizations.)

Why is there so much funder scrutiny for this section? The rule of thumb in proposal preparation is to set aside 15 percent of the project's budget total for the evaluation process. This is a large chunk of money, and funders have established this rule of thumb. It means that funders place a high value on planning, implementation, and follow-up when it comes to evaluation tasks.

Funders ask:

- How will we know that our money made a significant difference in our geographic funding area?
- How will we know that our money led to social or systemic change for the target population?

BUDGET

Funders ask these questions:

- Funding Parameters. (How large or how small is this project?)
 1. Does the total grant request fall within our range for grant funding? (Is this grant applicant looking to us for the entire amount?)
 2. Is the applicant asking for one year of funding support? (Can we afford to start this project and continue it, as well?)
 3. Is the applicant asking for multiple years of funding support? (What will happen if we start this project and cannot fund it in Year 2? Does the grant applicant have another plan for Year 2 funding support?)
- Dependency on Grant Funds
 1. If the applicant is seeking multiple-year funding, does the applicant gradually decrease the amount requested in Years 2, 3, and so forth?
 2. How will the applicant continue this program or project when grant funds are expended?
 3. What other sources of income does the grant applicant have for this program or project?
- Salaries and Fringe Benefits
 1. Are the salaries and fringe benefits reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. Based on the grant applicant's region, is the salary line item inflated?
 3. Are the salaries competitive and comparable to other nonprofit organizations in the grant applicant's geographic area?
 4. Are the fringe benefits prorated for positions less than full-time positions?
 5. Are the fringe benefits reasonable when compared to other nonprofit fringe benefit packages in the same geographic region?
 6. Did the grant applicant build a cost-of-living allowance into the salary line item for multiyear grant requests.
 7. Does each salaried position listed have an FTE? Note: FTE means Full-Time Equivalency. 1.0 FTE is 40 hours per week; 0.5 FTE is 20 hours per week.
- Travel
 1. Are the travel costs reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. Is the travel necessary?
 3. Is the cost for local travel reasonable?
 4. Is the cost for out-of-town or out-of-state travel reasonable?
 5. Is the mileage reimbursement rate in alignment with state and federal rates?
- Equipment
 1. Are the equipment costs reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. What is the grant applicant asking for under the equipment line item?
 3. Will equipment be purchased that costs over \$300?
 4. Will the equipment be maintained?
- Construction
 1. Are the construction costs estimated or bid?
 2. Are the construction bids attached?
 3. Is there a contingency cost built in?

4. Is there a site plan attached?
- Contractual
 1. Are the contractors' costs reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. Are the contractors listed mentioned in the Program Design section of the grant proposal?
 3. Are the contractors necessary?
 4. Can staff perform the work that contractors are being asked to perform?
 5. Are the contractors' costs reasonable?
 6. Are the costs broken down by amount per hour and number of hours?
 7. Is there supporting documentation in the attachments on the contractors' credentials?
 - Supplies
 1. Are the supply costs reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. Are the costs broken down by month?
 - Other Expenses
 1. Are the other expenses reasonable for the project's activities?
 2. Are the other expenses detailed?
 3. Are the items listed as other expenses under the correct line item?
 - Accuracy
 1. Are the column totals correct?
 2. Are the forms, if required, filled out correctly?