FUNDED

A GRANTS OFFICE PUBLICATION

AUGUST 2013 VOLUME 3, ISSUE 6

NAVIGATING USAID FORWARD

CYBER SECURITY AND FEDERAL GRANTWRITING

MAKE YOUR PROJECT A PRIORITY

MAKING THE MOST OF REVIEWER COMMENTARY

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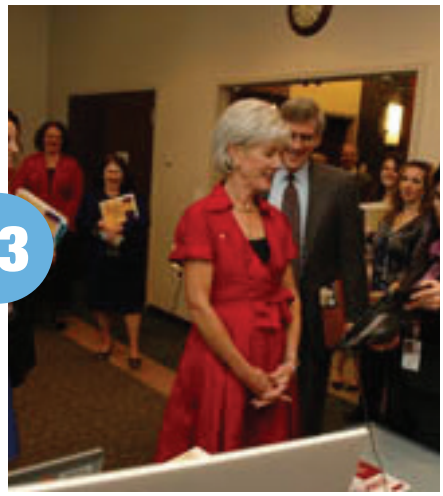

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ON THE COVER

Angelina Jolie, U.N.'s goodwill ambassador, talks with USAID/Haiti Mission Director Carleene Dei (in black vest) at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Jolie spoke about child-protection issues with the State Department, USAID and USAID partner Pan American Development Foundation.

More effective management and accountability of these and other regional USAID partners is a major goal of the USAID Forward program. It remains to be seen whether star power or bureaucratic process refinements are at all effective at keeping money and resources in the hands of its intended recipients. (USAID photo by Kendra Helmer)

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

People often shy away from advocating for their projects, even when they are confident in the impact the project will have for their organizations and communities. This happens for a number of reasons, including a fear of rejection, a distaste for "politicking," or even a fear of being caught up in a dynamic and successful project whose future demands are not clear and that could potentially create a tidal wave of responsibility for its leaders.

Those who manage to overcome these largely hypothetical obstacles, though, find that advocacy works, and they and their communities are made better by their efforts to attract support for worthwhile projects. In this month's FUNDED, we'll review some helpful tips for making your project an organizational priority.

Speaking of overcoming obstacles, in his Between the Lines column this month, Chris LaPage discusses how your project can actually benefit if your proposal is rejected.

Guest columnist Stephen Galati also provides some valuable forward-looking insight on the implications of cyber security on the grants development process, and Matt Hawkes discusses the evolving mechanism of international development funding from USAID, defined in many ways by its success (or lack thereof) at getting its funding used for its intended purpose.

We're on the lookout for successful projects to highlight, so If you have a story you'd like to share, or if you'd just like to enlighten us with your feedback and suggestions for future issues, feel free to e-mail me at mpaddock@grantsoffice.com.

I hope you enjoy this issue of FUNDED as much as we've enjoyed bringing it to you!

Sincerely,

Michael Paddock
Editor and Publisher, *FUNDED*

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Skyline High School students in Colorado show their math and science skills through trebuchet building during the summer session of STEM Academy. Eighty-eight students participated in this summer's 4-week program funded by an i3 grant. (Department of Education photo)

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS TALENT EXPANSION PROGRAM

SUMMARY: The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Talent Expansion Program (STEP) seeks to increase the number of students (U.S. citizens or permanent residents) receiving associate or baccalaureate degrees in established or emerging fields within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Type 1 proposals are solicited that provide for full implementation efforts at academic institutions. Type 2 proposals are solicited that support educational research projects on associate or baccalaureate degree attainment in STEM.

Type 1 proposals are invited from academic institutions accredited in, and having a campus located in the United States and its territories, from consortia thereof, or from nonprofit organizations that have established consortia among such academic institutions. The academic institutions must offer either associate degrees or baccalaureate degrees in science, technology, engineering and/or mathematics (STEM). Associate degree-granting institutions with a demonstrated record of articulation to STEM baccalaureate programs need not necessarily grant associate degrees in STEM fields in order to be eligible for this program. Projects may involve a single institution, collaboration with business and industry partners, or collaboration among several institutions. For example, projects may include collaborative efforts that improve the transition of students among the collaborating institutions, such as transfer between two- and four-year institutions. Type 2 proposals are invited from any individual or organization eligible to submit proposals to the NSF.

DEADLINE: Applications are due September 26, 2013.

AWARD AMOUNTS: Approximately $30 million is available to support 20 awards.

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE: http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf11550

USAID FORWARD FOCUSES ON RESULTS IN INTERNATIONAL AID

by Matthew Hawkes

Foreign development assistance faces a set of challenges, which have been years in the making. For decades the role of official and direct foreign assistance from USAID has fallen by the wayside in favor of private sector capital flows as business is conducted more and more abroad. To make matters worse, many of those countries receiving USAID aid are holdovers of cold war era strategic interests, which have since graduated to a sustainable middle-income level.

Although USAID recognizes the need to shift attention to the least developed states, several intractable problems remain, owing to the top down approach of USAID development assistance and manifested in the form of corruption, lack of accountability, and the dependency it creates. The last two administrations have made it a priority to change this approach, resulting in the creation of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, an entirely separate agency from the State Department or USAID which emphasized a strict conditionality of aid to incentivize lasting improvements. In the current administration, there is a new policy directive pushing for concrete measurable outcomes tied to aid.

To maintain relevancy in this budget conscious and results oriented landscape, USAID in recent years has been undergoing a substantial reform effort termed "USAID Forward," whose overarching objectives have been defined by an Obama administration policy directive. Its objectives include creating the conditions for which aid is no longer needed in the future and "delivering clear, compelling, and measurable results," as USAID chief administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah has stated in his keynote address at the 2013 USAID Forward progress report in Washington.

In order to fulfill this directive, USAID is now developing country-specific strategies for all countries it operates in, and with future projects aligning with those strategy guidelines. Analysts have speculated that the possible implication from this is that organizations may no longer have to try and guess what a particular mission director is thinking for the next solicitation.

Now with overarching strategies, organizations can look at these strategies as blueprints for future projects and plan accordingly. The design of projects will also improve as USAID has hired hundreds of new staff to design much more specific requests for proposals based upon the capacity of local organizations. USAID has also made a commitment to leverage the resources of private sector partners to further integrate technology-based innovations into design, allowing for better-informed projects. These partnerships will serve to reduce the USAID global footprint. Working with partners does not require the establishment of whole USAID missions in the region, which will in turn help to reduce costs.

As a result of more well defined projects adhering to overarching strategies, and with some being designed with smaller organizations and partnerships in mind, local awards should become much more numerous. This will also allow for greater transparency and oversight and ultimately better responsiveness to real "on the ground" issues that the USAID programs are trying to solve. Taking a page from the Millenium Challenge Corporation, it seems that USAID will in this way be more selective in its distribution of aid, based on set guidelines defined and encouraging better project design.

USAID Forward is an ambitious reform effort that could, if implemented successfully, expand procurement opportunities for local organizations, bilateral aid agencies, and international organizations. In the words of Dr. Shah, "In the end much depends on the agency's new staff and their ability to manage a larger volume of smaller contracts. If Congress were to significantly cut USAID's operating budget (which seems to be the trend), it would slow these reforms to a crawl, since so much is predicated on USAID taking on management, planning, and design functions that they have contracted-out in the past."

Even in the face of these possible setbacks, USAID Forward seems to have the momentum to continue beyond the Obama administration. Having apparently learned from recent failures to prevent corruption in Afghanistan and Iraq, USAID has emerged with a renewed focus on obtaining clear, compelling, and measurable results for funding.

More effective management and accountability of these and other regional USAID partners is a major goal of the USAID Forward program. It remains to be seen whether star power or bureaucratic process refinements are at all effective at keeping money and resources in the hands of its intended recipients. (USAID photo by Kendra Helmer)"

UNDERSTANDING CYBER SECURITY AND HOW IT AFFECTS FEDERAL GRANT WRITING

By Stephen R. Galati, CGW, AMP.APMP

With the prevalence of Internet accessibility and worldwide connectivity ingrained within all aspects of American life, cyber attacks have now become an imposing security threat to the Federal Government, U.S.-based businesses, and to all American citizens.

According to the University of Maryland – University College (2013), cyber security focuses on protecting computers, networks, programs and data from unintended or unauthorized access, change or destruction. During a Senate hearing in March 2013, the nation's top intelligence officials warned that cyber attacks and digital spying are the top threats to national security, eclipsing terrorism. Sadly, cyber attacks are happening every day to the federal government and have become a serious "all government" issue.

Building cyber security as a core capability for the country has become a significant factor in federal grants and emergency planning. Establishing national cyber security capabilities will provide the foundation on which to build operational functions in cyber response and recovery, and enhanced coordination of activities though all levels of the federal government. As such, funds from each of the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) components – State Homeland Security Program, Urban Areas Security Initiative, Metropolitan Medical Response System, and Citizen Corps Program – can be used to invest in functions that support and enhance State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) cyber security programs.

As a grantwriter, this means that cyber security elements will creep into your federal grant applications. A better understanding of cyber threats and security measures will ultimately help strengthen your grant applications and improve your ability to secure the funding. Some areas where cyber security will surface include equipment investments, planning, training, drills and exercises, and personnel. To gain a greater understanding of cyber security related to the federal government, you need to understand the state of cyber security legislation, recognize cyber information resources, and learn how to stay in the know.

The Long Road to Passing the Cybersecurity Act of 2012

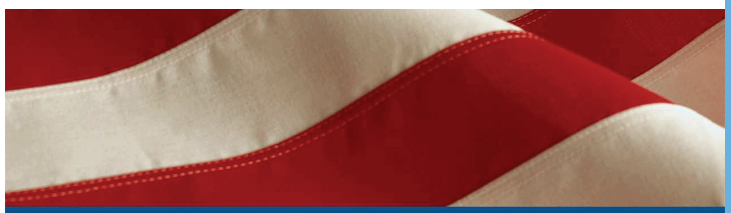
The Cybersecurity Act of 2012, introduced by Senators Joseph Lieberman [I-CT] and Susan Collins [R-ME] to the Senate in February 2012, called for the establishment of a National Cybersecurity Council to focus on cyber risk assessments, identification of critical infrastructure, cybersecurity practices and procedures, and technical guidance. The bill was passed by the House of Representative previously, but stalled in the Senate. It was reintroduced in July 2012, but did not receive the required votes to pass. In February 2013 as an effort to fill the gap in legislation, President Obama released an *Executive Order on Cybersecurity* and the *Presidential Policy Directive on Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience* (see the Resources section below for more information). With the Executive Order and Presidential Directive in place, the government can remain focused on cyber attacks and security practices, share cyber security-related information, and continue to rewrite the Cybersecurity Act of 2012 so that it can be passed into legislation (ASIS, 2013).

Write Provocative Grants by Staying Informed about Cyber Events

The United States Government is now hyper-aware of the dangers of cyber attacks and is taking a leadership stance on cyber security and information dissemination. As such, the Department of Homeland Security organized the United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT) to lead the government's

efforts to "improve the nation's cyber security posture, coordinate cyber information sharing, and proactively manage cyber risks to the Nation while protecting the constitutional rights of Americans" (US-Cert, 2013, ¶ 1). Understanding what the US-CERT does, the information they provide to citizens, and the affiliations they have with major corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, and over 250 other organizations, will arm grant writers with the necessary information needed to incorporate sensible, effective, compliant, and provocative solutions within their grant applications.

So, as a grant writer, how can you stay informed about cyber events and cyber security information? One easy and effective way to stay informed is through the National Cyber Awareness System (NCAS), a dynamic information alert system that makes available up-to-date cyber security information. NCAS provides information on current security-related activity, avails alerts to your email address, provides weekly bulletins of new vulnerabilities, and provides tips on common security issues facing the general public. All of this information is useful when writing federally-funded grants where there is money tied to cyber security activities. Staying informed about cyber events and security solutions may be the advantage you need to make your grant application outshine the ever-increasing competition and capture the funding.



Blueprint for a Secure Cyber Future

The Cybersecurity Strategy for the Homeland Security Enterprise

November 2011

The Department of Homeland Security's Blueprint for a Secure Cyber Future represents one framework within which stakeholders in government, the private sector, and international partners work together to develop cybersecurity capabilities.

Although they may not fully grasp the technical requirements of cybersecurity, funders generally support the cost of securing the technology that will be purchased with grant funds, if the applicants request funding for that purpose.
(Department of Homeland Security Document)

CYBER SECURITY RESOURCES

Whether you are new to cyber security or have been involved with cyber security issues in the past, the following resources will be useful tools to your grant writing arsenal.

1. Fact Sheet: Executive Order on Cyber Security / Presidential Policy Directive on Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience

http://www.dhs.gov/news/2013/02/13/fact-sheet-executive-order-cybersecurity-presidential-policy-directive-critical

2. Cyber Security Legislation and Revised Cyber Security Act

http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/issues/cybersecurity

3. Cyber Security Overview

http://www.dhs.gov/cybersecurity-overview

4. The National Strategy to secure Cyberspace

http://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/cyberspace_strategy.pdf

5. The Comprehensive National Cyber Security Initiative

http://www.whitehouse.gov/cybersecurity/comprehensive-national-cybersecurity-initiative

6. DHS Cyber Security Publications

http://www.dhs.gov/cybersecurity-publications

7. Ancillary Cyber Security Information

http://www.dhs.gov/topic/cybersecurity

8. US-CERT National Cyber Awareness System

http://www.us-cert.gov/ncas

9. FY2013 Homeland Security Grant Program Supplemental resource: Cyber Security Guidance

http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=7495

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University of Maryland – University College. (2013). Cyber security primer. Retrieved from http://www.umuc.edu/cybersecurity/about/cybersecurity-basics.cfm

US-CERT. (2013). About us. Retrieved from http://www.us-cert.gov/about-us

DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE GRANTS: STILL TRENDY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

by Michael Paddock

The USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grants have certainly been afforded a level of attention that is out of step with its roughly $20 million size (down to $17 million in 2013). By any measure of federal grantmaking, this is a small program, but a Web search of "DLT Grants" yields nearly ten times as many results as a similar search for the half-billion dollar Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program. In all fairness, it could be the long name that makes TAACCCT less popular than DLT. It could also be the fact that TAACCCT has only been in existence since 2009, while the DLT program began in 1993.

Nevertheless, the popularity of the DLT program also makes it highly competitive, which allows the USDA to be extremely selective and fund only projects that will benefit the most remote, innovative, and beneficial applications from organizations that are fully committed to the project, both operationally and financially. It also allows the USDA to require a herculean effort from applicants just to develop and submit compliant applications, despite the reality that most of them will end up in the rejection pile.

So, why does the DLT program continue to attract so many applicants and inspire so much dedication from urban medical centers, Alaskan outposts, and even suburban schools who have no business applying for these grants?

The answer lies partly in the program's mix of restrictiveness and openness. Specifically, while DLT grants are limited to funding only point to point telecommunications-based (i.e., not Internet-based) video conferencing connections between "hubs" (providers of distance learning or telemedicine content) and "end-users" (beneficiaries of the content), almost anyone can apply for a grant. That means that even for-profit telecommunications companies, whose services stand to see a spike in use, can apply themselves or lead a collaborative application (editor's note: telecom services fees can't be funded directly by the grant). In that context, the question "Are we eligible to apply?" practically disappears, leaving only the question "What shall we apply for?"

Moreover, the actual content that will be delivered over the network is left to the imaginations (and justification) of potential applicants. Anything from Arabic language instruction to zoster virus screening are fair game. Especially for educators and physicians in the most rural ares of the country who are accustomed to just making do, the sense of possibility that DLT technologies engender are inspirational indeed!

If, in spite of its competitiveness, its restrictiveness, its complexity, and its matching requirement, you're planning to submit a DLT application this year, here are a few tips to help make your application more successful.

Dedicate resources to developing the application

DLT grant applications go way beyond just writing a narrative and budget. They test every skill in the grantwriter's toolkit, from displaying data extracted from several official sources and obtaining commitments and certifications from banks, participants, and the USDA Rural Development State Director, to writing technology plans and assembling physical or virtual binders.

Because of the effort these applications require, it makes sense to commit either an internal staff resource or an outside grants development professional, or both, to ensure the application is as competitive as can be.

Prepare to exceed the matching requirement, in cash

The official matching requirement for DLT is 15% of the total project cost (grant award + match), but because the USDA adds valuable points to the score of applications that exceed the required match, there's almost no chance to win an award without at least providing a dollar for dollar match (defined in the DLT framework as a 50% match).

Moreover, DLT reviewers are trained to spot fuzzy in-kind matching commitments, and will readily eliminate those from consideration during their review. The loss of additional points for matching ("leveraging" in DLT parlance) can easily remove your application from contention for an award, and a documented cash match is least likely to get cut during review.

Choose all your sites carefully

It's natural to want to include as many sites as you can in your project. After all, they all deserve to participate in the goodness that your new telecommunication capability will offer. That may be true, but the DLT objective scoring penalizes applications that include any but the most remote and needy end-user sites. Further, hub sites must only provide content, and should not receive any benefit from DLT-funded content.

Plan to fund less rural sites or so-called "hub/end-user" (mixed use/benefit) sites from some other source. Don't mention them or include them in your plans. If you find after you've run the population and economic need numbers (using census and National School Lunch Program data) that some of your sites are bringing down your overall score, cut them from the project. Its better for you to be inflexible with a few of your colleagues before you submit your application than to increase the likelihood of rejection of your entire project by an unsympathetic DLT reviewer.

Reach out to vendors for help

The extra attention on DLT is also due at least in part to the fact that unlike many more flexible and comprehensive federal grant programs (like TAACCCT), DLT awards are used almost entirely to fund equipment. As such, the bright line to the sale of video conferencing products that DLT awards follow has made it a favorite for vendors of these products to highlight with free training and support resources

That can be a boon to you as a potential applicant. Since you're going to be purchasing equipment from one these vendors if you win an award (and don't think they don't know it), it's only fair that they should commit some level of active participation to the process. Whether you just need a quote to use as the basis for budget estimates or you need more extensive application-specific support, you'll find nearly every video conferencing vendor has access to some resource that can help you in your quest to win an elusive DLT award.

The continued need for expanded educational and healthcare services in many remote rural areas, like this Native village of Tatitlek, in Alaska's Prince William Sound, may explain why the DLT program continues to attract such a high number of applications each year, despite its relatively modest size, compared with other federal healthcare and education programs. (USDA photo)

DLT RESOURCES ABOUND!

Grants Office provides a number of resources to help you with your DLT application.

Free

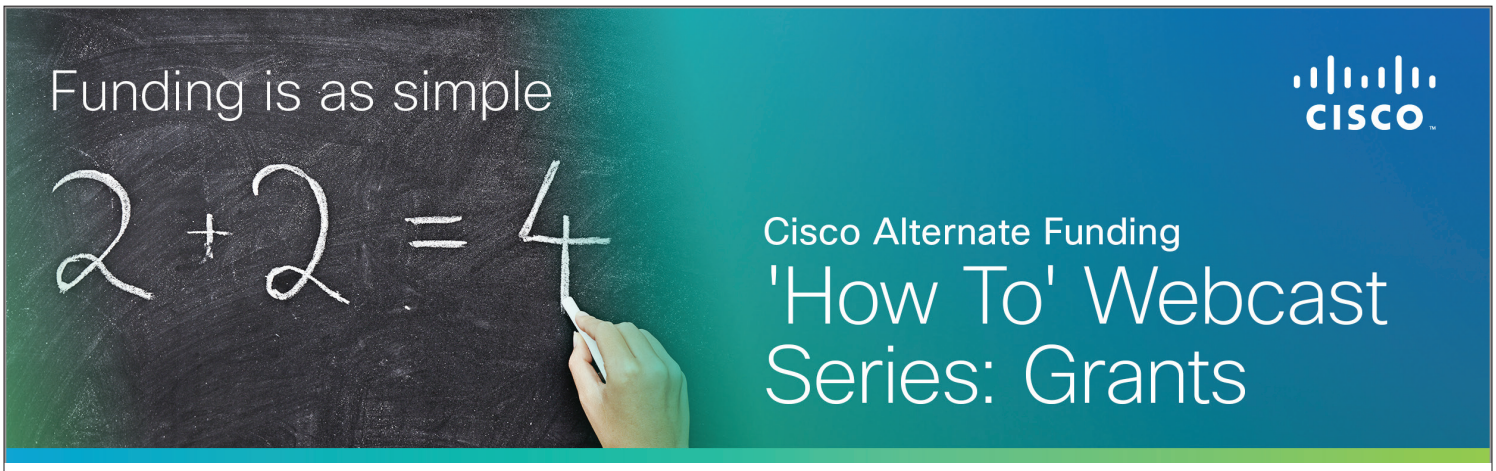
Webcast: Keeping up with the 2013 Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants (www.SchoolITGrants.info/Webcasts)

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Informational Site (www.DLTGrants.info)

Paid

Full Proposal Development Service (grantwriting@grantsoffice.com)

Comprehensive Proposal Editing (grantwriting@grantsoffice.com)



Cisco Alternate Funding

'How To' Webcast Series: Grants

Register Now

Thursday, August 8
2 p.m. ET

Webcast details available upon registration.

Keep an eye out for the next webcast in our "How To" series on Financing.

Register for the Grants webcast here.

Grant funding presents a landscape of opportunities through the financial assistance that is administered by 26 federal agencies, 56 states and territories, and more than 40,000 private foundations, each with its own priorities, approach, and application requirements. Funding for technology projects may come from any of these sources, and the process of sifting through them to find the best prospects can be overwhelming.

Join Cisco and Grants Office CEO, Michael Paddock, as he discusses best practices for navigating technology-friendly funding opportunities and provides tools for identifying and qualifying the best opportunities.

After attending this webcast, you will be able to:

- Identify the funding sources that provide grants
- Access and use research resources to help you find prospects for funding
- Determine the technology orientation of grant programs
- Evaluate grant programs for alignment with your project
- Forecast upcoming deadlines for past grants
- Establish a grant-seeking plan that works best for you

If you have been looking for a way to comb through the landscape of grant opportunities, you won't want to miss this informative and critical event. Register today.

Register at: http://tools.cisco.com/gems/cust/customerSite.do?SEMINAR_CODE=S18681

MAKING THE MOST OF REVIEWER COMMENTARY

by Chris LaPage

Excerpt 1: Proposal failed to effectively demonstrate the local community need that will be addressed with grant funds.

Excerpt 2: Proposal clearly identifies the needs of local community, but failed to make a convincing case the project would continue once the project period concludes.

Excerpt 3: Applicant organization appears to be in a good position to fulfill project outcomes, but failed to make a case that the project would not proceed in absence of grant funding.

The aforementioned excerpts are prime examples of reviewer comments that an applicant may receive upon rejection of an application for funding. Feeling frustrated and disappointed at being rejected, many folks will ignore the reviewer feedback or simply give it a cursory look to see where it fell short. Considering the cyclical nature of grants, the reviewer feedback and commentary should be treated as one of the most valuable pieces to any future proposal development. If the feedback does not help you resubmit a better proposal to the same grant program next year, it certainly will be useful as you explore alternative funders.

The problem for many folks is that the feedback is not always provided in a structured format that allows you to isolate specific areas of the proposal that need work. In the process of reviewing hundreds of applications, the quantity and quality of feedback a reviewer provides to any one applicant varies greatly. Don't be frustrated if the feedback provided seems abstract, or is open to interpretation. Excerpt 1 (referenced above) is one example of a common comment that an applicant may receive from a funding agency in response to their application. It is a relatively generic comment that highlights a critical weakness in the applicant's proposal. Grant funding is predicated on addressing a community need, which must be identified and supported in the application with accompanying evidence and statistical information. This comment is beneficial as it points to the general area of the proposal (Needs) that was weak, but lacks specificity to really assist the applicant in their future grantseeking endeavors. Applicants will need to review the sections of the proposal that identify the community need with a critical lens. Better yet, it is advised that you find a third-party that is not associated with the project to help you with this process. For instance, you may have made a good case of the community need, but being in the trenches, you may not have used language and explanations appropriate for a 3rd party reviewer who most likely has no working knowledge of community in which the project is taking place. When developing a proposal, always go the extra step and make sure you are erring on the side of over-explanation rather than run the risk that the reviewer will draw undesirable conclusions.

Another common misstep by applicants that receive feedback in line with Excerpt 1 is an over-reliance on macro-statistics. For instance, if a grant program is soliciting proposals to utilize telehealth to provide care to underserved communities, make sure you are providing data that supports the need in your local community. Spending dozens of pages on the overarching benefits of telemedicine, the rates of uninsured patients across the country and similar information is not helpful. In fact, you are simply regurgitating the data that has provided the impetus for the creation and release of the grant program. The funder wants to understand what the need is in your local community. You need to address questions such as the following:

1. Are you isolated in a rural area by mountains?
2. How long do residents in the community typically travel to the nearest hospital or clinic?
3. Is there a shortage of medical personnel in your area? What specialties? How many primary care physicians per capita in your area?
4. How do the local (micro) statistics compare to state and national averages (macro)?

Failing to drill down to the local level is the primary reason that a reviewer will likely find that the community need has not been identified or supported with evidence in the application.

Excerpt 2 is another great example of common feedback you may receive from a funder. One thing to note with a comment like this one is that most folks miss the first half of this statement as they only look for the weaknesses of their submitted proposal. It is just as important to read between the lines and understand what the reviewer saw in terms of the strength of your proposal. Any type of resubmission or repurposing of the proposal should focus on both addressing the weaknesses and highlighting the strengths. In this case, it's clear the applicant doesn't have to worry about the "community need" problem indicative of a comment like Excerpt 1. Instead, the community need section should be viewed as strength moving forward. Instead, Excerpt 2 refers to one of the most common pitfalls with projects positioned in grant proposals, which comes down to sustainability. What happens when the grant funding dries up? For the most part, grants are intended to fund the start-up costs associated with unique and innovative projects. As such, funders place a high value on providing seed funds for a project that appears positioned to continue beyond the performance period. Applicants are wise to develop and articulate a sound sustainability plan within their funding proposals. Sometimes it's as simple as explicitly stating that the program being established has high front-end fixed costs (e.g. equipment, training) but that the ongoing operating expenses are affordable. For instance, a dual-enrollment program that utilizes distance learning technology between a high school and a college has high up-front costs associated with hardware and software acquisition. However, once the equipment is in place, the project can continue indefinitely as it will be supported by faculty employed by the college and minor maintenance contracts on the equipment. The latter may be supported by a small fee collected from participating students. Too often applicants will overlook the sustainability plan, and it costs them with reviewers.

Finally, Excerpt 3 highlights the careful balancing act that must take place with funding proposals. Just like Excerpt 2, let us take note of the first half of the critique. Apparently, the applicant did a superb job of demonstrating they have the organizational resources and capabilities to follow-through on the project articulated in their proposal. Unfortunately, they may have done too good a job in that respect. Grants usually are predicated on the fact that without the influx of such funding, a particular project would not be possible. In the process of demonstrating they have the organizational wherewithal to be trusted with the funder's money, an applicant may inadvertently supply evidence and data that suggests they are in good financial position to do the project regardless of the grant funds. For instance, many times an applicant will want to appear flexible and provide the funder with several financing scenarios. For example, a health system may be trying to set up a primary care clinic in their community. In doing so, they may present a funder with several options such as covering the entire cost of the new clinic. Such a scenario would involve construction costs, medical supplies, office equipment, and hiring personnel. Alternatively, in an effort to appear flexible, they may offer an alternative where the funder just covers the construction and they provide evidence that they are in good financial shape to outfit the clinic and hire the necessary staff. The unintended consequence is that the reviewer ends up feeling there is not a true need in this particular case and that the applicant is going to proceed with setting up the new clinic regardless of the funder's decision. In the end, the applicant must be sure to strike a balance in their narrative between organizational resources and the need for funding.

It is natural to feel disappointed when your proposal is denied funding. However, it is vital to immediately move past viewing that specific proposal submission as a distinct, self-contained unit. Grant-seeking is a journey, and while each submission along the way is intended to result in funding, there is no such thing as a wasted effort. The reviewer feedback associated with failed submissions should be viewed as an essential consolation prize that will help you move forward and put you on a path to funding.

Reviewers comments are more than simply an up or down appraisal of your proposal. They include explanations of why various sections of your proposal received the score they did. Moreover, reviewer's notes provide an objective assessment of your proposal in the context of the specific scoring criteria used to make funding decisions.

AHRQ HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH DEMONSTRATION AND DISSEMINATION GRANTS (R18)

SUMMARY: This program solicits Large Research Demonstration and Dissemination (R18) Projects, and expresses AHRQ portfolio priority areas of interest for ongoing extramural health services research grants.

AHRQ seeks a wide range of research projects. However, all grant applications must contain projects that fit within the current AHRQ Research Portfolio areas. AHRQ

Research Portfolios include:

- Comparative Effectiveness
- Health Information Technology
- Patient Safety
- Prevention and Care Management
- Value

Specific information about current priority areas of focus for AHRQ Research Portfolios are articulated at http://www.ahrq.gov/fund/foaguidance.htm. Contacting an AHRQ staff member may help focus the research plan based on an understanding of the AHRQ mission and portfolio priorities. AHRQ staff contacts can be found at http://www.ahrq.gov/fund/staffcon.htm.

Although the PD/PI writes the grant application and is responsible for conducting and supervising the research, the actual applicant is the research institution/organization.

DEADLINE: Applications are due September 25, 2013.

AWARD AMOUNTS: The total costs (direct and indirect costs) awarded to a grant under this program will not exceed $250,000 annually for the entire project period. The maximum project period for an application submitted under this program is 5 years. Cost sharing is not required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-13-046.html

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MAKE YOUR PROJECT A PRIORITY

by Michael Paddock

Everyone has a list of project ideas they'd like to see become reality. Some keep it in their heads. Some write it down on scrap paper. Some develop elaborately styled electronic documents. More important than how you keep the list, though, is what you do with it.

Advocacy (with a capital A). It reads like something big national organizations or lobbyists do to try to influence national legislation, but advocacy (little a) has a place in every organization, large and small, less structured agencies and heavily regulated institutions. But before you start advocating for your projects to others, you need to clarify for yourself exactly what it is you want to change in your world.

Refine your list

Probably the most important single action you can take to ensure your project ideas get taken seriously is to limit the list to only the projects that are objectively meritorious. Your personal opinion about the projects shouldn't be the only reason people want to support them. If you don't have a compelling (preferably measurable) benefit or need that is addressed by each project on the list, start eliminating projects.

By the end of this process, you should have a (much) shorter list of projects that you feel passionate about and that you have strong objective reasons for wanting to move forward.

Get input from people you trust

You feel confident that each of the projects on your list is worthwhile, but you have your own biases (everyone does - I'm not just picking on you personally) that will color your sense of what's worthwhile. For a reality check, sit down with two or three people whose opinions you trust and talk to them about the merits of your projects.

Take their constructive feedback in its entirety, and try to resist selectively hearing only the positive feedback or interpreting any negative feedback as a personal assault (both of which are also common biases).

Earnestly probing trusted colleagues for their input and honestly considering the impact their input should have on your list of projects, and the project themselves may also earn you a foundation of support on which you can build for the next step.

Build a coalition around project themes

Talk to as many people as you think would be interested in participating in and supporting your projects. Remember that institutional project are almost always collaborative, meaning that you'll need to stay flexible as the projects develop. Stay true to the objective reasons you had for including the project in your list in the first place. Fight for those fundamental characteristics, but let others have input into the design of the projects as well.

Depending on the number of projects you are trying to move forward, more than one group may naturally emerge around different themes.Technology-heavy projects might attract one group, while more administrative or outreach-oriented projects might appeal to others. Again, flexibility is crucial to ensure your projects continue to move forward.

Get something in writing

It doesn't have to be lengthy, but moving your project forward from here is going to require more than just talk. You need something in writing. Developing a collaborative two-page framework for each of your projects in conjunction with your coalition members is a great place to start. You may feel like you're doing all the work and they're sharing in the credit, and that's probably true, but leadership (little l) often means just doing the work to get the projects to a point where everyone else is willing to hitch their wagons to your star.

The framework need not be too detailed. The process

of preparing a couple of grant applications will enable you and the coalitions ample opportunity to flesh out the details of the project. But it should include the objective reason you thought the projects were important in the first place, a high level overview of what the project looks like, what internal and external resources it will require, and a rough estimate of the costs.

Get executive support to start grantseeking

With the backing of your coalition(s), you can then approach the executive decision maker for your department or organization to get his or her assent to begin looking for funding for your projects. Depending on your organization, this may be a board rather than a single individual.

Tell them the objective reasons you thought the project was important, the path you've taken so far, and the representativeness of your coalition, and share your framework document with them.

You're looking for formal approval to begin seeking outside funds for your projects. Note that this same process often works to access internal funds for projects as well. If you can free up some budget to cover the cost of grant opportunity research and proposal development, that's even better!

Viola! If all goes well, your project list is a bona fide organizational priority, and you're on your way to seeing your ideas become reality! If not, or if only a couple of your ideas seemed to resonate, don't be discouraged. Follow up on the projects that are gaining traction, and use your successes at implementing those as a platform for weaving your other ideas back into the conversation.

Participation alone can teach you a lot about how to get things done in your organization, and the process of advocating for your ideas can teach you a lot about yourself along the way.

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