

Grant Writer's Handbook

For Successful Grant Proposals
A 5-Step Process & Toolkit
To Achieve State & Local Grant Success Goals



Written by
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The authors, through their combined 30 years of actual and relevant experience, have performed extensive research and analysis to bring the reader the first and most comprehensive desk reference available on successfully developing, applying and winning grant funding targeted specifically for First Responder and Public Safety Agencies. The book is designed and targeted specifically at the common public safety or first responder employee offering them a comprehensive, yet easily understood guide, to understanding, developing applying and successfully winning grant funding from the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal, State, Corporate and Private Foundation funding sources.

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Foreword

Welcome to the world of grants for public safety agencies. Are you tired of seeing the budget axe swung at your department's funding year after year? Are you fed up with using "hand-me-downs" from other agencies and being told to "make do with what you have?" Is your equipment older than you are? Are you sick and tired of hearing "maybe in next year's budget" from your top administrators? Then it is time for your department to learn about the billions of dollars in grants that are available for your use, every year in the United States.

At some point in time, we all must realize that our tax bases, from which we draw our salaries and operating budgets, are shrinking at an alarming rate. Taxpayers, of whom you are also one, can only afford to fund just so many tax increases year after year. If they are not already doing so, eventually they will start saying, "enough is enough"! These words are the bane of every public safety agency in the United States. Let's face it; if your town or city is not growing, then neither is your tax base.

Although you may have experienced significant growth during the last ten years, the projected growth for the future is not so promising given our country's current economic condition. Yet, your annual calls for service are steadily increasing and in many cases, the tax dollars needed to support additional personnel, vehicles, new office space, and equipment has not kept pace with the demand for these services. Money simply to operate our departments has become frequently scarce. Where is this money supposed to come from for the increased salaries, step-pay plans, new vehicles, and new, state-of-the-art equipment?

Public Safety Agencies across the United States are now being tasked to do more with less. It takes money to fight criminals and terrorists who are endowed with seemingly unlimited supplies of money and who routinely outspend us 10-1 on technological advances. So what is your department to do? One solution is to use grant-funding streams!

Every year in this country there is \$100+ billion dollars in Federal, State, Local, Foundation/Corporate, and private grants available for these purposes. Money for equipment, personnel, and programs to fight or defend the safety and sanctity of our way of life is there for your use. It has always been there, sometimes less than at other times, but the programs have existed for decades to assist you in your missions. New grant programs open on a regular basis, but this information often remains obscured from your normal everyday agendas. After all, the task of grant writing to the average public safety employee is usually just “another duty as assigned”.

So, why are so many departments not getting this money every year? The answer is decidedly simple. Grants are like the lottery; “if you don’t play, you can’t win!” It is that simple. Many of you reading this have probably tried to write a grant at sometime, only to receive the dreaded rejection notice or “Dear John” letter. It is never easy to accept rejection especially for a public safety employee. We work in a very machismo type job and saying “no” to one of us, is usually a certain ride to the local lockup. We don’t take rejection well at all, as it stifles our desire to forge forward and try again. You may have decided that it is not worth your time to read and re-read an RFP (request for proposal) that is 80 pages long, just to find out if you can get a box of pens for free.

Admit it! Most of us in this profession do not have English majors or degrees in creative writing. You are “adrenaline junkies;” who would rather be out “cuffing and stuffing”, “putting wet stuff on the red stuff” or “saving lives” than spending hours researching, reading, and writing a grant. We know you do not have hours of idle free time sitting around to research, apply for and manage a grant. This is understandable and the authors have experienced your pain as well.

This book is presented in language that you, as a public safety official, will understand and is based upon the experiences and education of two of the country’s top public safety grant consultants. That knowledge and experience has resulted in millions of dollars in grant awards to agencies, just like yours, across the United States. This book is the benefit of those years of experience and the miles that the authors have walked in your shoes. So get ready to learn what it takes to be a winner in this “grants ballgame”. There are rules, playbooks, and team members. Those who play closest to the rules, usually win.

Symbols

Throughout this book you will see a number of icons displayed. The icons are there to help you as you work through the Seven Step process. Each icon acts as an advisory – for instance alerting you to things that you must always do or should never do. The icons used are:



This is something that you must always do



This is something you should never do



Really useful tips



Points to bear in mind



Have you checked off or answered everything on this list?

Introduction

Find and Train The Right Person

The first step for any organization to take in deciding to participate in grants, is to recognize that it takes a specific type of person to accomplish this task. Grants require a great deal of reading and comprehension and the ability to stay organized and focused on the task. It is, therefore, essential to properly choose and train the right person in your organization who will be developed into the “grants specialist.”

The person you choose should possess most if not all of the following skills:

- ▶ **Organizational skills** – grant proposals are highly organized documents. There is paperwork that must be placed in order, documents that will need to be written and tracked and reporting requirements that must be met in a timely fashion. This requires that the person being placed in charge of these tasks be organized themselves, in order to comply with timelines, reporting requirements and deadlines.
- ▶ **Communication skills** – From the first day that you signed on as a public safety employee you had to learn to communicate effectively with the public, your peers and amongst yourselves. We all “speak the language” when it comes to radio communications. A good grant writer learns to communicate those verbal skills into the written word. Grant writing is nothing more than being an effective story teller. The task is very similar to being a photo-journalist where the photographer’s eye and camera capture an image and relay that image and its feeling and impact to the viewer in a visual format. A grant must essentially do the same thing, It is a snapshot of the

working environment and community that you live and work in, being related in 10 minutes or less to someone who has never seen or heard anything about you or your community and department. Failed grants typically present a black and white photograph, where a good grant writer delivers an 8X10, color glossy, 15 megapixel photo clearly showing the problem and a solution.

- ▶ **Ability to focus**- It is essential that a grant writer stay focused on the task at hand. A grant has to present a reasoned and well thought out plan to the reviewer in order to receive a funding award. If you are easily distracted, you will leave out critical details that must be included as part of a truly comprehensive and well planned project.
- ▶ **Technical report writing skills** – This is a basic skill that all effective public safety employees should already possess. Our profession requires and demands good, accurate reports to be written and filed on the incidents that we respond to. If you have been a public safety employee for any length of time you probably already possess this skill or have been placed through some remediation training to improve this ability.
- ▶ **Thinking “Outside the Box”** – This is probably the single biggest skill that a successful grant writer can possess. Grant writing is all about new and unique ideas. A good grant application always presents a unique solution, to a unique problem for a unique community. This is a task where your imagination can run wild as you envision a better, safer, or more efficient way for getting the job done. Grant writing is similar to being in Research & Development at a big private company. Do it better, faster, longer with less tools, spending less money and getting a large “bang for the buck” are the calls to duty. Being able to step outside the traditional way of doing things and see things from a different perspective of “what if” is a big plus. Dreamers with active imaginations do well in this field. It is encouraged.
- ▶ **Ability to work unsupervised** – If you are the type of person who has to have someone cracking the whip over your head at all times to motivate you, you will not do well in this field. Grant writing is for the most part a solitary task. It is a thought process whereby random ideas are analyzed and discarded; disorder is placed into order and then transferred from brain to paper. It is usually best accomplished in quiet places with deep reflection and forethought before placing pen to paper. It requires a person that is a self-starter and deeply motivated to succeed. You do not need a supervisor standing over your shoulder, mucking up your thought process or causing you to stray from program priorities, goals, and objectives that having never read and comprehended the RFP, they would know nothing about.
- ▶ **Punctuality** – There is a single rule in grant writing that all grant writers must never violate. Grant deadlines are chiseled in stone. Miss a deadline and \$250K in badly needed funding is gone for a full year and probably, so is your job as a grant writer. Punctuality is not a recommended virtue here, it is an absolute necessity!

- ▶ **Computer Literacy** – Grant writing requires research and knowledge beyond your local work environment. The advent of modern computers and availability of the Internet to grant writers was similar in scope with what the invention of automobiles was to horse and buggy days. Twenty-some years ago grant writing research literally took months to accomplish because all the research had to be done by hand, mail or in person investigation. You needed an army of workers to collect and collate all the information that was needed in a grant application to get funded. Those same tasks today are performed with a mouse click from the comfort of your Lazy-Boy and within seconds of your question, you have an answer. It will not be long, as a result of the Federal Paperwork Reduction Act, that all Federal grant applications will have to be filed electronically.

The above listed skills and traits can help you identify who might be the most logical choice for assigning the task of grant writing. Remember, desire and willingness to do the job will always be a deciding factor in choosing the right person.

Once this person is identified, you must provide them with the proper tools to perform the task, including formalized grant writer development training. This book is a good, comprehensive first start but should not be interpreted as the sole source for providing that training and those skill sets. Seeking out professional advice and training should be a continual and ongoing quest.

So, Exactly What Is A Grant?

If you are the prospective grant writer it makes sense to understand exactly what a grant is, where this money comes from and why it is being given away.

“A form of gift that entails certain obligations on the part of the grantee and Expectations on the part of the grantor” Dorsey Dictionary

In good old plain English a grant is a monetary award to perform certain deeds or services and achieve certain goals and objectives to solve a unique, particular problem in your agency and community. But just exactly where does this money they give away come from? A grant maker, or funding source, needs to be thought of more or less as a bank in which money is collected and then distributed.

In the case of a Federal grant program the money collected comes from the taxes that you and I pay every year. From some of those taxes, money is distributed to various public agencies that use that money to build roads and bridges, pay for education, fund health care research and health care programs and other social service type programs. This is how all of these things get built within our communities or paid for. In the case of public safety agencies in the U.S., these tax dollars go to organizations such as the Department of Justice, National Institute for Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration, Centers for Dis-

ease Control, and a myriad of other organizations. That money is then apportioned to states and the trickle-down effect begins on getting that money into the hands of local government agencies of which you are a part.

In the case of a private, community or corporate funding source the money is typically collected from wealthy or philanthropic individuals and pooled together, as in the case of Community Foundations or non-profit groups to whom private citizens and businesses donate. Corporate entities collect the dollars they will give away from the company profits and this money is then channeled into their charitable giving arms or foundations. The primary reason for all this giving by these groups is quite simple; they receive a tax break from the IRS for doing so. There is certainly a “sympathy factor” here in wanting to “do good in our community” but quite frankly, most people who donate and/or companies who have charitable foundations they support are doing so to garner better public relations and they use it as a marketing tool and tax break option. The overriding theme of corporate and private foundations in their giving rests in “improving the human condition” be that through education, social, service programs, health, and economic improvement.

How do you think new tools are developed - that improve efficiency or devise new and safer techniques for dealing with crime? Grant makers are always looking for the “easy replication factor” in your programs. In other words, can another agency easily do the same thing and expect to achieve the same results? They want to see new cost-effective ways of dealing with problems. Some examples of these programs are Crime Prevention Officers, Neighborhood Watch Programs, Community Oriented Policing, DARE and Fire Prevention and Safety Programs. All of these grant programs were started as the result of a grant program that demonstrated a new idea and this idea worked or improved efficiency and achieved the result sought. The results of the evaluations of those programs provided the basis for taking this program to other agencies in the hopes of achieving similar results. This is important to know if you expect to be successful at approaching grant funding sources. The results that they are seeking in order to give away the money in the first place usually revolved around:

- ▶ cost effective and saved money
- ▶ easily replicated by others who would achieve the same results
- ▶ resulted in a safer or more efficient means to accomplish something

In other words life got better and easier for the citizens or those performing the tasks for those citizens.

Every agency has needs, but grantors are typically interested in funding projects that will serve a large audience of citizens for a greater good, benefit the community, provide additional safety or reduce or eliminate a problem. This is often referred to as “cost benefit” or “bang for their buck.” When you write a grant application, you must “think” the problem through thoroughly. Just as a bank will ask for a “business plan” before lending you money to open a business, a grantor will want to know what your game plan is. That is why grants are mostly “competitive” in nature. Grantors will give the best and most comprehensive plans, the most consideration.