

# Talking to funders

## A Few Practical Grant Proposal Submission Tips

### Resource Sheet

2013-01

It is common for an organization to look at several questions when preparing proposals for potential funders. What information should be included? To whom should it be addressed? Should we ask for a meeting prior to submitting our proposal? How should we make certain our proposal stands out? Here are a few tips inspired by our own experience.

### THE BEST PRACTICES

- 1- **Keep informed:** Make sure you have the exact contact information for the funder. Try to gather information on grants made to similar organizations (read annual reports they make for great bedside reading!).
- 2- **Contact the funder:** Validate the correlation between your mission/project and the funder's objectives.
- 3- **Respect the procedures put in place by the funder:** documents to provide, number of proposals that can be submitted annually, person in charge of following up on proposal...
- 4- **Be Transparent:** Avoid "creative accounting". Present a budget that reflects reality (not perceived expectations). An organization's "overall health report" is always well received.
- 5- **Know your stuff:** Be ready to answer questions, including those about financial statements. Pay attention to significant gaps in revenues/expenses from one year to another.
- 6- **Ask the right thing to the right funder:** Some funders will provide core mission funding while others prefer specific projects. Be strategic!
- 7- **Follow-up on your grants:** Even if the reporting is informal, it helps maintain healthy long term relationships.
- 8- **Ask your funders what else they could do for you, beyond financial support:** expertise, resource sharing, contacts...
- 9- **Use grants as leverage:** Ask your funders to explain exactly why they chose to work with you and use these arguments as leverage with new funders.
- 10 – **Become a star grantee by sharing your expertise with your funders.**
- 11- **Shine!** There is no better introduction than a positive reference from a fellow grantee or funder. It is also the best way to attract the attention of funders who do not accept unsolicited proposals.

## A BRILLIANT PROPOSAL

= A concise proposal

- ✓ which presents a healthy mix of emotions and pragmatism
- ✓ which does not skirt challenges but present practical and innovative solutions
- ✓ which clearly states its uniqueness in relation to similar projects
- ✓ whose grant seeker is well connected in its community, open to collaboration and knowledge sharing

## PLEASE AVOID

1- Mailing mistakes as well as generic proposals.

2- Multiple proposals: Many funders accept only one proposal per organization per year.

3- Unreasonable requests: Amounts that are out of proportion, budgets where the whole project depends on one funder (which could affect longevity), proposals with very superficial links to the funder's interests/objectives

4- Persistence in trying to obtain a meeting with a trustee or the Executive Director: If you have a contact on the board, simply inform them that you have submitted a proposal. If you do not have a contact, make friends! The person who answers your call will be able to guide you.

5- Empty phrases: Avoid meaningless talk and technical lingo too closely linked to your area of intervention.

6- Aggressive techniques and approaches: No one wants to feel pressured to make a donation.

7- Compromising your mission for the sake of a donation: Flexibility is appreciated. Not undue deference. Do not hesitate to defend your point of view when a funder makes a demand that could jeopardize your organization's effectiveness (unrealistic impact measures, work processes that do not fit your mission or vision...).

## INTERESTING RESOURCES:

### **Foundation Center**

[http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/prop\\_fr.html](http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/prop_fr.html)

### **Proposal writing short course**

Established in 1956, the Foundation Center is a leading source of worldwide philanthropic information. Its Website offers a series of short free courses in various languages pertaining to various aspects of non-profit funding, including the various steps to submitting a proposal.

### **The Center for Effective Philanthropy**

<http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org/index.php?page=funder-grantee-relationships>

### **Funder-Grantee Relationships**

CEP has information on what non-profit grantees value based on rigorous data collected from tens of thousands of grantees from nearly 250 foundations. These foundations include a wide range of types, such as programmatic foundations and those with a geographical focus or based on amount of assets. Information is available on several other demographic attributes.