Grant Writing Workshop notes 2023

There are less grants available right now, our governments have spent a lot of money on pandemic needs and funds are low. We are also not in the midst of an election or working up to one. For Government grants the rule is there will be grant calls in the months leading up to an election, and this counts for both Provincial and Federal. So, you can go now sometimes four years between major grant calls and I know that doesn’t sound encouraging but it is what it is. So please pay attention to the election cycles. There are also favourite spots to put money in grants, right now housing is a top issue, as well and addictions and mental health. I, after many years, am beginning to see changes but leading up to an election I think will never change as it is a way to get votes of the electorate who pays attention and needs something.

Work within your community. What has really happened in the last few years is more and more people and agencies have discovered that grants can keep a program running and keep staff employed so many agencies have become very closed off to other community groups, especially if they have great ideas and the time to write grants. What we need is less secrecy and more community building. Think about getting a grant to help your community and your clients or the people in your community, rather than your agency or for keeping your job. We have to have agencies work together and that is what many funders are looking for right now, less administration but a further reach of a program.

Federally, some of the more recent grants have called for a lot of volunteer capacity, we must work together as agencies to show that you cannot put together a successful program without administration costs and staff costs. We cannot put everything onto volunteers, in fact they really don’t exist in all of our communities, because they are aging out and the younger generation is very busy working to make a place in their community, so volunteers are decreasing, not increasing.

A lot of companies will try to sell you grant programs, save your money, google has it for free.

There are also consultants popping up again, that will offer to do it for you for a fee. It is best to do grant proposals in house, you and your workers/employees know your organization and know what you can do.

I have heard a lot of griping lately about reporting. That is one of the most important steps of grant writing, grant proposals and program building. Report and report well, keep stats, data, info, testimonials on your program after getting a grant. Thank the funder, no matter who they are. These grants make a difference in our communities. Please report and report well, it makes all of us look good.

I am rural and it is harder to get grants in rural because a lot of the funders are based in large urban centres, this includes our government funders. Try to explain to someone in Gatineau Quebec why you cannot hand out taxi chits for a program. I always ask them to look at a map and explain where Flagstaff is, in Alberta and Canada. We are rural and remote, we have to explain that succinctly, just because we have less population, doesn’t mean we should have less programs and less government funding. It is an argument that is easy for me to make, but many don’t stress it enough. In rural we have low numbers, so cost per person/client is usually much higher for any program. Describe this and why in your grant proposal, and make the rural/remote case. We can’t get funding if they do not understand our population. Have your rationale ready for why you are doing the program, who is going to be helped by it, why the program is needed, why you have lower numbers than an urban area. Be ready to explain, explain, explain and have numbers, stats, data to back it up.

Follow the guidelines on grant applications, word for word. If you answer a question the same, don’t worry because you answered the question. When doing government grants or any grant in fact be honest at all times, because our circumstances change, if there is any proposed change report it up front. The **do it and ask for forgiveness later edict** does not work with grants.

I always do the budget first for any grant application. Once you know how and what you are going to spend the money on, the words will just flow out of you. To me, the budget is the most important part of the entire document. You are going to be judged on how you spend money and how your vision is translated to money. The bean counters still want fiscal accountability. It always surprises me when the funder, or the person you are reporting to, doesn’t understand what the program being funded is doing, honestly it is because the budget was the most important part of the grant proposal to the funders handing out the money.

Be very patient. I have worked on a few Federal grants in the last year and wow it takes them a long time to get back to you. The ESDC says for last Julys grant call you would find out by November of 2022 if you were successful, well it seems they are negotiating those budgets and programs now, more than one year later. If you are unsuccessful in the end, don’t get depressed or angry, it doesn’t mean you did anything wrong, it usually just means that they received many more proposals than they had money for. And now look at the bright side, you have a template for the next grant call, whether it is from the same agency or department or not. I partnered with another local agency and we presented a Letter of Intent to a funder and we were not chosen to move forward in the grant call because they had over 530 applications for funding for 15 projects nation-wide, but we still entered in the grant fray with the Letter of Intent and we have that partnership and that plan for another grant call that may become open.

I know we are all not non-profits, but for grants I believe the game is the same whether you are a Municipality, a non-profit, a mixture. Watch for grants calls on the news, google **available grants**, check out provincial, federal and municipal websites. Each community always has groups in their area that may grant money out as well: think Lions clubs, Legions, Kinsmen, other groups like Rotary. In our area we also have the Battle River Community Foundation and Community Foundations exist all over this country so google them and find out how and when they have grant calls and what your group needs to do to access them.

Grant writing is an art but I believe anyone can do it with patience, caring, passion and commitment.

Relationships are important, work with your community people, your elected officials, your neighbours who may be involved with something and in Alberta I have a soft spot for your local FCSS, a lot of them are in the business of helping people with community development, to build a relationship. A lot of rural areas and urban have what is called an interagency host and you can make inroads with the human services needs and outcomes in your area if you can connect with your local interagency.