STRENGTHENING GRANT APPLICATION SKILLS FOR NEW AND GROWING ORGANIZATIONS

RRRISE IN-PERSON CONVENING
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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

WELCOME

USING STORYTELLING TO CRAFT
A COMPELLING NARRATIVE

BUILDING A GRANT BUDGET

ALIGNING WITH FUNDER
PRIORITIES

DISCUSSION

Goals:

Leave with practical knowledge and skills

What are your goals?

WRITE A [THREE-SENTENCE] STORY ABOUT THIS PICTURE.

DISCUSSION

- How did you approach this exercise?

- What did you like about the stories you just heard?

- Why/how do you think funders respond to stories?

USING STORYTELLING TO CRAFT A COMPELLING NARRATIVE

Story arc: progression from tension to resolution

- Beginning, middle, end
- Past, present, future
- Challenge/need, solution, outcome/impact

Characters: people, communities, partners

Setting: time and place

Point of view, tone: your perspective and voice

Theme: central message and idea

STATEMENT OF NEED: THE MAIN CHALLENGE

- Introduce the challenge or need.
  - Who is affected, how serious it is, and why it matters now.
  - Create urgency and emotional connection.

- Clearly describe the situation.
  - Make the story local and relevant - address specific circumstances, technologies, practices, communities and cultures.
  - Use data and examples of human impact.
  - Provide evidence of what the future holds if not resolved.

- Avoid overwhelming with too many issues.
  - Focus on the "theme" – or leading idea.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: YOUR SOLUTION

- Describe who you are - include partners.

- Outline and unpack your approach.
    - What you do and how you do it uniquely.
    - Address specific strategies and practices.
    - Consider a thesing ory of change, logic model or another diagram.

- Explain why your approach works – use data, practice knowledge.
    - Connect to evidence-based practices when possible.

- Clearly state outputs, products, deliverables – tangible results.

OUTCOME/RESOLUTION: DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

- Show the transformation—how lives will be different, what success looks like, and the lasting change your work will create.

- Describe how practices and results that matter to your people *and the funder* will be captured and communicated.

- Distinguish short-term outputs vs. long-term outcomes vs. impact.

- Rely on evidence if available - quantifiable results, success stories and testimonials.

Challenges:

Honoring and describing indigenous approaches, solutions, results.

New and untested ideas – acting when there is no or little evidence.

New and untested partnerships – describing the strength of your relationship(s).

Applying to a new funder for the first time – why they should invest in your work.

CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

Preparation Strategy

- Anticipate the call: groundwork.

- Review the entire RFP: compare sections with evaluation criteria.

- Preapplication: Info webinars, question and answer period.

- Go/no go decisions: team input.

- Post-award: feedback and communication.

Language

- Emotional attributes

  - Fear, vulnerable, risk

  - Thrive, heal, grow, flourish

  - Succeed, gain, prosper

- Strategic attributes

  - Tested, effective, efficient

  - First, unique, authentic

  - Replicate, expand, enhance

TIPS

Using AI

- Appropriate uses

- Drawbacks

- Suggested practices

Common Missteps

- Too modest or grandiose

- Focus on organizational needs instead of community impact

- Generic statements

- Forgetting to connect back to funder's priorities

Best Practices

- Active voice, clear, compelling language

- Lead with impact

- Include those affected – voices, testimonials

- Show specific examples (don't just tell)

- Make the funder important

BUILDING A GRANT BUDGET

Essential Elements

- Personnel

- Operating expenses

- Contractors

- In-kind contributions

- Matching funds

- Administrative and Indirect Costs

- Narrative
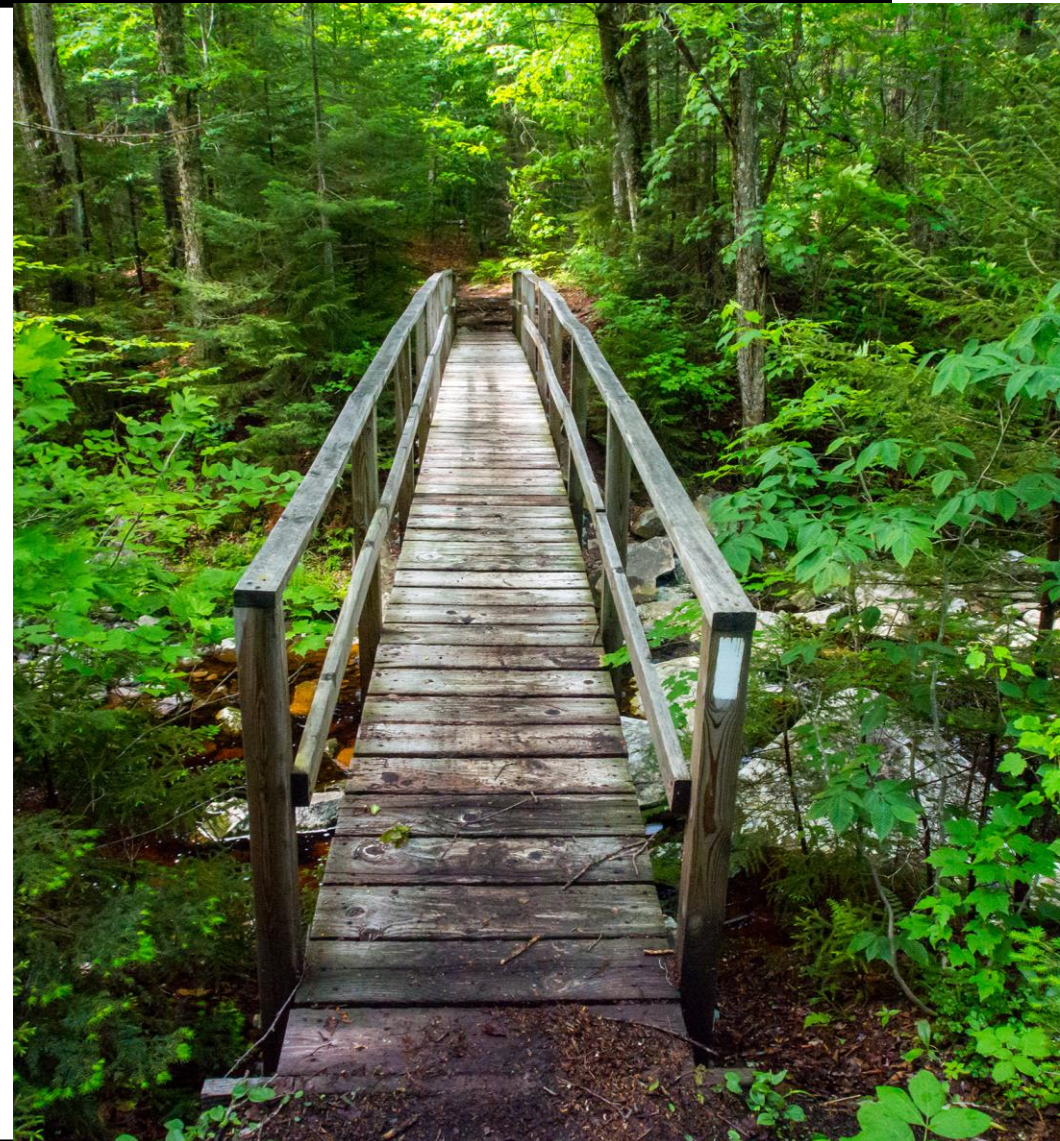
COMMON REQUIREMENTS

- Cost reimbursement

- Restricted/unrestricted funds

- Matching funds

- Period of performance

- Allocable expenditures

- Prevailing wage

- Attachments (IRS or audit letter, financials, board list, etc.)

TIPS

- Use funder's budget template when provided

- Be realistic and accurate – have you accounted for all possible costs to your organization?

  - To manage the project? Relationship with funder? Coordinate staff and partners?

  - To hire/staff up? Implement/conduct all activities?

  - Expectations for an evaluation (self, funder or 3rd party)?

  - To satisfy administrative and program reporting requirements and payment schedules?

  - To purchase, upgrade, install, train users on systems, software, or equipment?

- Show matching funds or leveraged resources

- Ensure budget aligns with program description

- Double-check all calculations

ALIGNING WITH FUNDER PRIORITIES: THE RIGHT FIT

- **Government grants (federal, state, local)**

  - Projects addressing public policy priorities, often evidence-based programs with measurable outcomes serving specific populations or geographic areas; usually restricted funding for specific purposes.

  - Competitive applications, detailed reporting, compliance with regulations, often multi-year funding with reimbursement-based payment.

- Foundations (private, family, community, corporate)

- Corporate giving programs

- Individual / major donors

ALIGNING WITH FUNDER PRIORITIES: THE RIGHT FIT (2)

Foundations: Varying application processes (some by invitation only). Often program and relationship-driven; annual or cyclical deadlines; smaller grants, more flexible funding and reporting. May fund programs, capacity building, or general operating support.

- Private/Family Foundations: Causes aligned with founder's interests (often education, health, arts, social, or community development).

- Community Foundations: Focus on specific geographic areas; fund local nonprofits addressing community needs (check local mission/priorities). Often offer multiple grant programs.

- Corporate Foundations: Causes aligned with company's business interests and values; often support communities where company operates, employee volunteer programs, and causes related to their industry.

ALIGNING WITH FUNDER PRIORITIES: THE RIGHT FIT (3)

Corporate Giving Programs

- Fund community initiatives in company's geographic area, employee volunteer matching, causes related to business sector, nonprofit capacity building, and disaster relief. May support sponsorships, employee engagement activities, community events, education programs, environmental initiatives, economic development.

- Often less formal than foundation grants, may include in-kind donations (products, services, volunteers), shorter application processes, focus on visibility and community relations.

Individual/Major Donors

- Fund causes they're personally passionate about, reflect personal experience, values, or community connection. Often flexible unrestricted funds for operating support, capital campaigns, program expansion, emergency needs, endowments, special projects. Can respond quickly to urgent needs.

- Relationship-based, highly personal, flexible terms, can provide multi-year support, often want direct connection to impact, may serve on boards or volunteer, typically smallest administrative burden.

TIPS

- Diversify funding sources

- Create a prospect list and tracking system

- Plan for application deadlines throughout the year

- Plan and implement strategies cultivating long-term relationships

DISCUSSION

- What strategies have you found effective?

- What are your biggest challenges?

TAKEAWAYS

Before You Submit

- Staff and project-manage the timeline from research to submission

- How will you work with partners

- Start early

- Follow instructions exactly

- Track all RFP updates and deadlines

- Get feedback from colleagues before submitting

After You Submit

- Follow-up and relationship building

- What to do if funded (contracting, partnering, launch)

- What to do if declined (requesting feedback, trying again)

- Learning from each application

THANK YOU

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