

## How to Use the Nine Steps to Better Grant Seeking

By Jane Geever, author of *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing*

It's not easy to summarize nearly thirty years of grantseeking experience in a simple folder that fits in pocket or purse, but we've tried. Along the way, we've interviewed grantmakers, written a major book on proposal writing and helped numerous not-for-profits build grantseeking programs. Now we've boiled down what we've learned into this booklet, which focuses on the most important steps that everyone needs to take when seeking funding for a project.

If you're a development professional or experienced grant seeker, these nine steps will serve as a handy checklist for any program you're working on. If you're new to the field, these nine steps will serve as a roadmap through the grantseeking wilderness.

Finally, remember that the grant is the opening of a partnership. Timely and honest communication is key. Submit all reports on time. If there are problems or challenges, communicate early and often with your partners since they can be a tremendous resource.

This booklet is adapted from *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing* by Jane Geever (New York: The Foundation Center, 2001.)

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## 1. Set your priorities

Grantmakers want you to begin with *your* priorities not theirs. A well-targeted proposal presents a specific project, program or service that meets an identifiable need and is a clear priority for your organization.

Whether you hold annual planning sessions or determine priorities on an ongoing basis, you should build a solid consensus around the funding priorities you will be presenting to potential funders.

## 2. Write your proposal

Grantmakers agree: you are better off writing a master proposal first, then adapting it to meet their criteria. By having a master proposal written, you can respond to a potential funder's need for information immediately, instead of making them wait for you to develop the document.

Your master proposal should be brief—eight to ten pages—and outline the need you must address, your goals and objectives, the activities you will undertake to achieve your goals and objectives, staffing for your program or project, the method by which you will evaluate your outcomes, and how you plan to sustain your program after the funder's grant expires.

You should include a concise budget and brief information about your organization, its mission and programs.

## 3. Add a summary and documentation

Help the reader by covering your proposal with a brief executive summary outlining the need you will address, your proposed

solution, your organization's qualifications and your funding requirements.

Each funder will also require supporting documentation, generally your 501c3, a list of Board members with affiliations, and financial information (audit, 990, and your organization budget).

## 4. Keep the packaging simple

You can send additional materials with your proposal but take care not to overwhelm your reader. Most grantmakers prefer not to receive unsolicited multi-media, such as videotapes or DVDs, although these may be requested at a later date.

Covers, folders and binders are not necessary (for some funders, they are annoying). Remember—it is the content, not the style, that counts.

## 5. Do your homework

Identify funders whose mission and giving match your priorities. There are over 68,000 foundations in the United States and information is available on all of them. Visit a Foundation Center library near you and make use of the many research materials available there free of charge. Or visit the Foundation Center's web site at [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org).

## 6. Contact the funder first

Grantmakers agree that it is often helpful for a grantseeker to contact them with questions or to vet an idea before submitting the proposal. Some grantmakers are amenable to an initial contact by telephone. Others

prefer a brief letter in advance of a proposal. In either case, the initial contact can help you refine your information and assumptions about why a grantmaker might fund your program.

## 7. Ask for the money

Wayne Gretsky said that you miss 100% of the shots that you do not take. The reality is that you will have to ask several grantmakers for funding to receive the support your program requires. If your homework and initial contact with a grantmaker suggest that your project is a good match, make the ask. Do not delay.

## 8. Cultivate, cultivate, cultivate

Your solicitation of a foundation does not end when your proposal goes into the mail. Judicious use of telephone, meetings, board contacts, written updates and progress reports demonstrates your interest. By helping the funder learn more about your organization and programs, you make it easier for them to respond positively to your proposal—or failing that, to work with you in the future.

## 9. "No" doesn't have to mean "never"

Follow up even if your proposal is turned down. A telephone call can prove helpful to both you and the donor to determine if you might try again at another time with another proposal or to learn how to improve your chances of getting your proposal funded by others.