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Producing Winning Grant Proposals

How Can You Win the Game of Grants?

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As a federal government relations professional principally serving higher education and municipal entities who consistently pursue external funding that includes federal grants, I focus on working with them to implement strategies to enhance their grants success in today's hyper-competitive environment due in part to challenging economic times. Like the great companies and athletes, grant seekers must work continuously to build their skills and augment their competitive edge.

It is interesting that strategic and analytical skills attained during my studies as a MBA student have become a major asset in developing plans to win grants when there is less federal grant money available. Although I spend much of my time reviewing and determining the impact of legislation, regulations, and federal funding actions, my past work with client grant efforts has expanded exponentially as their respective strategic plans have called for increased external funding. My outreach and that of clients with federal program managers has always been part of our work but even more so in today's climate. Overall, I have enjoyed digging deeper into the grants world to help clients advance and imple-

ment programs that improve infrastructure, education, and the quality of life in their communities.

The good news is that the elements of a strong grant proposal remains unchanged. Producing a winning application begins well in advance of the actual writing. In working with clients, the first step in the process is in-depth funding research to identify potential grant opportunities that best match the university's mission, objectives and academic expertise. That should be followed a second step, program planning that includes a thorough review and interpretation of application guidelines, extensive discussions by the grant team to evaluate the grant opportunity pros and cons, and determining the team's approach and plan in moving forward to write the grant. This also would include identifying the local need and devising a plan to address that need and the objectives set forth in the grant solicitation with outcome-based programs.

The third step of the process to increase the chances of winning grants is a professional review of the grant draft proposal. My clients have found value in our grants review and strategy

conference calls, written comments and feedback, and our ability to keenly focus on how to convince grant makers to fund their projects. Throughout the process of preparing a grant application, we will answer client questions, suggest resources, provide ongoing professional advice by phone or webinar, review proposals, and recommend options for maximizing the competitiveness of grant applications.

In today's competitive grants environment, grant applicants must develop proposals that are outcome based, innovative, well thought out, clearly written, and relevant. Even if it sounds like a broken record, transparent budgets and rigorous evaluation plans should always be strong components of your application. Also, in some instances, depending on the grant and respective agency, securing letters of support from stakeholders and elected officials can be beneficial.

Finally, there are various ways to approach to developing grant proposals but I invite you to use these steps and think outside the box to create highly competitive grant proposals!