

Accessing Local and State Government Grants

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12/11/03

It is widely recognized within the field of Community Development that strong working relations between governmental entities and civic institutions are the foundation of successful community betterment efforts. Moreover, the collective resources of businesses, governmental agencies, and nonprofit organizations are needed to address the complex challenges facing communities in a meaningful way. Experiences gained by communities of all sizes throughout the state of Kansas clearly reinforce these observations.

Consequently, it is common practice for federal, state, and local governments to offer grants to nonprofit organizations in order to meet community needs. Each year, millions of dollars are allocated to nonprofits to deliver a wide variety of services for many different target populations.

The question is: What steps can your agency take to improve its chances of receiving government grants?

The following suggestions are based on experiences gained from working for local and state governments as well as serving as a board member and employee for nonprofit organizations:

- **Conduct joint planning** – Time invested in planning and goal setting on a routine basis is an important way to communicate priorities to external stakeholders. In particular, taking the steps to involve leaders from the city, county, and schools provides the forum to create shared vision statements and strategic priorities.
- **Practice regular communication** – In addition to joint strategic planning, organizations should provide information on a regular basis regarding program accomplishments and important announcements. This regular flow of information helps reinforce positive views about your organization and keeps it in the minds of your local and state leaders.
- **Find common interests** – While a governmental agency is charged with addressing community priorities as part of its core mission, it is important to be mindful that it is an organization like any other that must rely on revenue and stakeholder support to fund its operations. Thus, an agency increases its chances for receiving grant funds by aligning its interests with that of a particular agency's core mission. Grant proposals that reduce operational burdens on a government agency while helping accomplish its mission are more likely to receive funding than those that do not offer these advantages.
- **Share leadership** – It is a good idea to recruit officials from government agencies to serve as volunteers and board members for your organization. It creates an opportunity for stronger ties between organizations as well as providing the benefit of the individual talents of that government official.
- **Communicate plans early and often** – Include government officials as early as possible when formulating plans for an important initiative that will require a particular agency's

involvement. The goal of regular communication is especially important during the planning phases of important projects.

- **Understand the grant decision-making process** – It is quite common for nonprofit executives to spend time learning the steps involved in good grant writing. Such knowledge is important. However, a good understanding of the decision-making process of the agency from which your organization intends to request funds is also important. Each agency relies upon its own unique process shaped by its employees and organizational culture to make funding decisions. The more your staff understands how that process works and the priorities of that organization the better are your chances for success.

The ability to work effectively with government agencies is an important skill for nonprofit organizations to master. Such efforts create the foundation upon which effective partnerships with are built. These partnerships can help improve your community and sustain your organization.