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## *Grant Writing: A Case Study*

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Not me, not grant writing. While I had always been a writer, I had studiously stayed away from grant writing. “Do you write?” I had been asked many times. “Yes, I write, but I don’t write grants.” “Grant writing is not within my scope of expertise.” “No, I’m really not interested in writing grants.” All those responses kept me safely away from the labyrinth of grant writing. Secretly, my little inner voice was constantly reminding me “too complicated”, “too complex”, “too much responsibility”, and very generically “DON’T DO IT!” Then, I retired from active teaching and took a job for someone who did write grants – lots of grants – and obtained millions of dollars doing so.

With my new job, I was still not interested in grant writing. Nope, I didn’t do grants. I did, however, try my best to do what my employer needed me to do. So, when the request came to “read these notes and summarize them into a few paragraphs on why we have these needs”, I dug into the task. After all, this was just read, summarize, and write. The content wasn’t hard, as I was already familiar with most of the issues I was reading about. I read, I summarized, I wrote.

A few days later my paragraphs had been read by my employer, and with a few light edits, put into the files (so I thought). In the mean time, I received another “read these notes, summarize, and write” task. This one was on the types of things that would meet the needs based on the problems I had written about earlier. No problem. I read, summarized, and wrote, and again the paragraphs went into the files.

This pattern went on for about 3 weeks, with each “read, summarize, and write” assignment on a slightly different version of the original larger topic of needs. Finally, came the culminating assignment. Take each of those individual, completed assignments, and meld them into one large file. Fine with me – that was an easy cut and paste job with headings. Upon completion came the punch like “Do you know you have just written your first grant?” Hummmm. . . .clearly not only was my employer much smarter than I was – as I totally did NOT see this coming, but also she had the people skills to get me through the whole process with no pain what so ever.

What is the lesson here? Anyone (even YOU) can write a grant. This inauspicious beginning did lead to more grant writing. My proudest moment was when the \$500,000.00 grant for the aquatics programs in our local school system was funded at the 95% level. That was MY grant – from topic right through to the start of implementation. I’ll remember that grant as long as live. If it weren’t over 50 pages long, I would have it framed!

I have learned a lot about grant writing along the way. Here are some encouraging observations –

- Grant writing is MUCH easier than one would think.

- If you can write a simple paragraph, you can write a 50 page grant. Those 50 pages are just one very long string of individual paragraphs.
- You become a better writer by writing. That's the only way to learn to write, by doing it over and over again.
- Not all grants get funded. You can write a great grant and not be funded for reasons that have nothing to do with your writing.
- What you learn by writing a grant that doesn't get funded will be very useful in writing your next grant. Rejections can be useful. They aren't the end of the world.
- There is a formula to grant writing. Most grants follow a very similar outline pattern.
- Using a time-line is a good way to organize for writing a grant. All grant projects have deadlines.
- If you are stuck, most granting institutions and organizations will readily provide information and assistance. Help is out there.
- Much grant money goes unrewarded because no one even bothers to apply for it.
- Grants have a better chance of success if a partnership with other community organizations is included.
- Most grants have the same, or similar component parts. Component parts are just combinations of those beginning paragraphs.
- Plan at least one to two years ahead. The funds granting process takes time.

The grant writing process can be broken into smaller, sequential steps.

- Determine what your needs are.
- Find an organization that has a vested interest in meeting your needs.
- Obtain the grant proposal requirements of your target organization.
- Develop partnerships in support of your proposal.
- Develop the timeline for your proposal.
- Write the appropriate sections of the grant proposal.
- Have someone else read and review your proposal.
- Revise your proposal based on reviewer comments.
- Submit your proposal ON TIME.
- Wait, the review process can take upwards of 6 months.
- If funded, celebrate and follow all directions for implementation and record keeping. Audits are a normal part of implementation.
- If not funded, obtain the commentary on why the grant was not funded. If this is not sent to you, you can request it.
- Use the commentary to review the grant and resubmit next year, or submit to a different agency.

A grant request can be as small as \$100.00 or as millions of dollars. The amount of money you request should be clearly related to your specific needs. Your grant proposal will need details – who will benefit, how, when, and why. Health and wellness, prevention of disease, lifestyle enhancement, and rehabilitation are all very nice terms. But, each is generic. Specific terms are weight loss, functional mobility, aquatic participation with the family, improved cardiorespiratory fitness, and functional use of an injured hand and arm.

You know your participants/clients best. Every program has participant based needs. Typically funded items are those that will insure on-going program enhancement even after the life of the grant has ended. These might include –

- Staff training to broaden skills and provide services to a new, expanded client/participant base, particularly a client base in a high risk/high incidence population.
- Equipment to broaden program offerings, especially to a newly expanded client/participant base.
- Resource materials to increase staff knowledge, particularly in new or expanding clinical areas.
- Technology to not only support, but expand program offerings.

Less frequently funded are items that will end their usefulness at the end of the funding period. Grants that live, and then “die” are not usually viewed as good investments. These might be –

- Participant reimbursement programs, funding to reduce costs for participants. Scholarships need enough financial support to be on going.
- Any item of equipment that needs maintenance beyond normal aquatic maintenance. Who will pay for future maintenance and repairs?
- Food and/or entertainment to interest people in coming to training. If you have to bribe people to attend training, do you really have a recognized need?
- Staffing positions. A position that is only filled for the length of the grant will disappear unless the organization receiving the grant makes a financial commitment to make that position on going.

Even less frequently funded are buildings. A structure is an extremely large expense and required a great deal of support after the fact of the grant. Usually grants do not build pools.

Organizations and businesses funding grants want to see their money having a lasting effect for the good of the most number of people. If your organization or program has needs and you can gather those initial notes, summarize them and write a paragraph, you can write a grant to help get those needs met.

The Aquatic Therapy and Rehab Institute frequently offers workshops on grant writing. Learn more specific details on the development process, obtain hints on how to internet search for granting organizations and businesses, and increase your familiarity with the language of grant writing. The more you become familiar with grant writing, the easier the entire process will become. Not everyone has an employer who will lead through the process, but almost everyone can write that very first paragraph. The journey of grant writing begins with that single step.