



ICJE, P.O. Box 293, Montgomery, AL 36101 * 334-280-0020

ICJE Feature Article, November 10, 2003

Grantwriting Basics

Therese Ford, M.P.A., J.D.

The best source for law enforcement and criminal justice grants is the federal government. Generally, the grant process is competitive meaning there is no guarantee that your grant application will be funded. Grants submitted to federal or state agencies are often evaluated by a panel of reviewers that use established criteria to rank the grant applications and determine, based on these rankings, which agencies' projects will be funded. When you are writing a grant, be sure to take the time to carefully read the application guidelines and give yourself enough time to adequately write up the grant application. Don't procrastinate and don't miss the deadline for submission. *A helpful hint is to make yourself a checklist of everything thing that is required including letters of support and any certifications that have to be included.*

Many people are confused about the whole process of writing grants. Often people are confused about what can actually be funded with a grant. Grants today are not revenue sharing as such. Federal grants are used to help local and state agencies fund special projects or, in some cases, mandated projects. Federal grants cannot be used to fund an on-going project or function of a department. This is considered *supplanting*.

There are two main types of grants available: Discretionary Grants and Block Grants. *Discretionary grants* are grants that are awarded directly to the state or local agencies by the federal granting agency. A major discretionary grant is the National Criminal History Improvement Program or NCHIP. *Block grants*, on the other hand, pass through a state agency such as a State Planning Agency, a Criminal Justice Authority or a Governor's Criminal Justice Commission. The Edward Byrne Memorial Program is an example of a block grant. Most grant projects are intended to provide "seed" money to start a local project with the intention that the project will be continued by local or state agency funds when the grant runs out. For this reason, letters of support are often required.

Getting Started

The *Federal Register* is a government publication that is produced every business day. You can access the *Federal Register* on the World Wide Web, microfiche and paper. The *Federal Register* includes Presidential documents, Rules and Regulations, Proposed Rules and Regulations and Special Notices, which are where you will find the grant guidelines. These guidelines will identify the federal funding agency, the type of projects that are to be funded, the estimated amount of money available as well as the number of projects that they expect to fund. It is very important that you read and re-read the grant guidelines very carefully. It is helpful to make an outline of the requirements listed in the grant guidelines so that you know your deadlines, page requirements, submission procedures, as well as the various issues to be discussed. Some of these guidelines go so far as to limit the number of pages in various sections of the grant and require that a certain font type and size be used in the application.

Pay special attention to the submission requirements. Some federal agencies require that all grant submissions be on-line through attached documents. Several of the Office of Justice Programs in the Justice Department requires on-line submission, which include the Violence against Women grants and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs. This is a result of e-Government initiatives and heightened security measures.

If your agency does not have Internet and e-Mail capabilities, it may be difficult for you to submit a grant application. Often, you will be required to pre-file your application a few weeks before the application deadline. This assures that your account is set up and allows the funding agency to know how many grant applications to expect.

Most federal grants require a problem statement or a project plan. Generally, if there is no problem why do you need money? This is where you make your case with data or statistics. You also must be able to outline your goals and objectives of the project. List the activities that will be grant funded. Most funding agencies will want to know how you will accomplish your goals and objectives. They will need to know who will manage the project, that person's experience, what equipment will be needed, what training will be required. An evaluation module will also be required. This will determine the success of the project. Some federal grants fund projects that can be replicated in other jurisdictions. Some grant guidelines will require outside evaluators to come in and evaluate the project. Other grant guidelines will allow you to use statistics gathered from your project to determine the number of people served, or the decrease in reported crime, etc.

The Budget and a Budget Narrative are very important to the grant application process. Federal agencies will require a realistic budget and the budget narrative should be used to explain how these figures were obtained. A lot of federal grants require matching funds. Check the guidelines to see if the match has to be hard cash or if in-kind match is allowed.

Look at your checklist that we discussed in the first paragraph. When you have everything crossed off you are ready to submit your application. If you are mailing it, make sure that you give ample time to reach the funding agency. The deadlines are hard deadlines and you can't get extensions. If you are sending your application on-line, give yourself time to get it sent. Some people do have trouble with the on-line submission, especially the first time that they use it. After submission, you wait to hear if your grant application is funded. Some agencies send you a letter indicating a successful grant application. If your grant was not funded, they will send you a letter explaining why it was not funded. If this is the case, use the letter to strengthen your application for the next time.

Writing a grant application is not a project you can do in a couple of days. You must research the topic, make alliances with other people or agencies, get support letters, and, show that you can administer the grant. Remember, the process is competitive and a lot of hard work but getting a grant can allow you to provide better services because of a little extra money.

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