**Eight Steps to Successful Grant Development**

**Step 1: Determine the needs of the beneficiaries in the service area and establish grant program ideas for meeting these needs prior to seeking grant funding.** Applicant agencies will be more successful in securing grant funds if they determine the needs of the beneficiaries of the grant program design, and research funding sources to improve the likelihood of funding for their specific approach to meeting clients' needs. Questions to consider prior to searching for grant funding may include: 1) What are the clients' needs? 2) What can the organization do to assist clients in meeting these needs? 3) What would an improved situation look like? and 4) How much would this project cost?

**Step 2: Carefully match your grant project idea with an appropriate funding source**. Grant funds generally come from two different sources, government funding and private funding. The applicant should do their homework about the proposed funding agencies to determine these agencies' mission and proposed funding priorities, and should seek a copy of the funding agency's Request for Proposal (RFP) or Notice of Funding Award (NOFA) . Organizations that thoroughly read the potential funding agency's website, their annual report, their members of their Board of Directors, and make an initial contact to discuss their grant concept or submit a Letter of Inquiry, if requested by the grantor will be more successful in receiving grant funding.

**Step 3:** **Explicitly follow the applicant's guidelines.** With proper research, the applicant should have the details on how to submit the grant application including deadline dates, the required proposal format, desired attachments, and page length restrictions of the potential funder. This information is located in the applicant's Request for Proposal (RFP) or Notice of Funding Award (NOFA). Read the RFP three times to ensure full compliance with the grant guidelines. First, read the RFP through the first as a quick read. Then read it slowly a second time, highlighting all the specific requirements of the submission of the grant. Upon completion of the grant, read the RFP a third and final time, ensuring all requirements are met. Customize the proposal for a specific funder. Although certain sections of information can be created as "boiler plate information", the grant application should be adjusted to ensure compliance with the specific guidelines of individual proposed funders.

**Step 4: Condense the narrative with rich detail.** Keeping with the page limitations set by the granting agency, the applicant should present their grant narrative in clear, concise language. With each draft of the proposal, the applicant should tighten the application to convey benefits quantified and objectives measurable. Avoid using empty adjectives, agency specific jargon and acronyms.

**Step 5: Ensure a community approach to the program design through collaboration.** Grantors are more likely to provide funding to an organization who is approaching their grant program concept through partnerships with other faith-based, or community-based organizations, rather than a stand-alone organization, idea, or individual. Funding agencies have realized the only way systemic problems in a community or a specific field of work get resolved is through a collaborative effort of varying agencies coming together through a strong partnership. Applicants are encouraged to elicit a Memorandum of Understanding or Letters of Partnership from collaborating agencies to ensure the various roles and responsibilities of the collaborative.

**Step 6: Know who will be reading the proposal.** The applicant must do their research to know who will be reading their grant proposal to determine the likelihood of potential funding. Often times program officers at the foundation level have been funding like-minded projects that directly relate to their foundation's mission and benefit the community and these individuals may have intimate knowledge of what's going on a particular field of service an applicant agency will be addressing in their proposal. These program officers may be aware of innovative approaches to solving community problems. On the contrary, most discretionary federal grants are read and scored by a set of peer reviewers who may have a slight understanding of the field of service, but not necessarily have the expertise in the particular field of study the project will be addressing. The applicant agency must understand who will be reading their proposal and should write their grant narrative with a level of detail to account for the various levels of expertise of the grant reviewers.

**Step 7: Consider a team approach to grant development.** An individual does not have to be alone in the development of the grant application. A team of individuals from within the agency, or from the collaborative partnerships that have been created to further the likelihood of grant funding can approach creating the grant application together. Through this process, team members can assist in gathering the information necessary to assist with the development of the narrative, however, one individual should be the author of the grant narrative to avoid varying degrees of writing styles within one grant application. In terms of time it takes to put a grant application together, a team approach can assist with the 80% preparation of a grant while one individual must complete the 20% writing of the grant narrative. Assignments for team members could include gathering data and statistics to assist in further supporting the need for the project, collecting budget details for the items to be purchased with grant funds, and determining a solid time line for grant implementation.

**Step 8: Establish an internal and external control mechanism for grant submissions.** Prior to applying for grant funding, an agency should create policies and procedures for grant submission and for grant management. A grant is a legally binding contract between the applicant agency and the funding agency, and there are expectations of the grantor once the grant has been awarded to ensure the grant will be implemented with fidelity and that budget and grant reporting requirements are met. An applicant should establish a mechanism to avoid duplication of submission of grants from a single agency, ensure that matching funds are available and are being carefully documented, and that individuals are not over-committing agency staff on various grant funded projects. Once grants are awarded, the agency must have grant management policies and procedures in place to ensure proper use of grant funds and to assist with grant implementation.